

THE LONDON READER

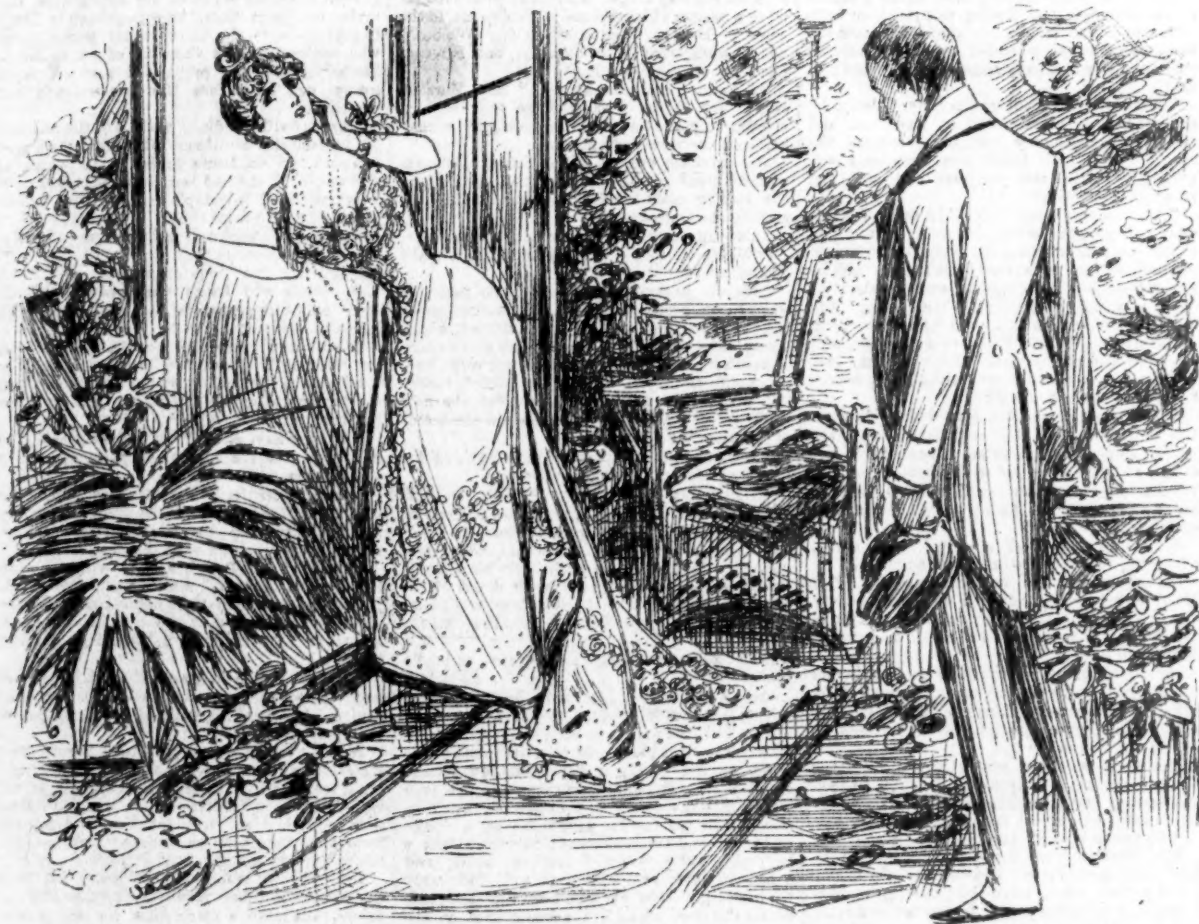
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"YOU! EGERT!" GASPED ADA. "I—WE—THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD!"

A TARDY CONFESSION.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

A BROTHER'S CHARGE.

Six o'clock, and the heavy fog which had enveloped London in semi-darkness during the day was still making itself visible, creeping in at every crevice of the door and windows, causing even the lamp to burn with a dull uncertain light, in the comfortably furnished room in which Mrs. Marston was seated with her daughter at Fulham Place, Fulham Road, making the keys of the time-worn piano bang, as the latter, a little girl of ten years, performed with alarming audacity the five-finger exercise.

Her mother was but twenty years her senior,

still bearing traces of the great beauty which in her youth she possessed, and which even now was more matured than lost in the exquisitely chased features, the soft dark eyes, and the purity of her complexion.

Little Ada so slightly resembled either of her parents that strangers could scarcely believe that she stood in that relationship to Mr. and Mrs. Marston, who, when first they came to reside at Fulham Place, brought her, a tiny wee thing, with a face like a doll's, surrounded with bright, golden hair, with them, for although the baby-girl received all the attention usually bestowed on children of her age, still the mother, far from lavishing that love on her which might be expected in the case of an only child, would at times show jealousy when her husband displayed any amount of affection for her; and one of the servants, who had been dismissed for impertinence, had told a friend of hers in the neighbouring establishment that, on one occasion, a lady even younger than Mrs. Marston had called on her mistress, when there was a fearful scene, which

ended by the visitor being told never to enter that house again; and the girl, for she was no more, was about to leave, when she caught little Ada in her arms, and pressing her to her bosom, sobbed as if her heart would break, then placing her on the ground, rushed from the place, banging the door after her.

But six o'clock had now struck some time, and Mrs. Marston still sat watching the flickering flames in the low grate, her tiny feet, encased in velvet slippers, placed on the bright steel of the fender, while the youthful musician continued to count one, two, three, four, as she placed each rosy finger on the yellow keys, until at last, raising her eyes to the ornate clock on the mantelpiece, she became aware of the hour.

"For goodness sake, Ada, do give over strumming," she said, impatiently. "Here is six o'clock, and papa not home yet," when rising from the seat she had occupied she advanced to the close curtained window, pulling aside the heavy drapery to look out on the dull, murky atmosphere without, where nothing was visible

but the lamps, which, looking like balls of fire, hung in the dark heavy air.

"What a dreadful night!" she said. "I trust nothing has happened to him," and she gave a start as Ada, in obedience to her command, closed the instrument, but with such a bang that the old wires vibrated for several seconds after.

"How careless you are, Ada!" Mrs. Marston said, annoyed at her own nervousness, and feeling irritable, whilst conjuring up in her mind a whole chapter of accidents which might have befallen her husband, to account for this unusual delay in his home-coming, until again glancing at the timepiece, and finding that another half-hour had passed by, she felt she could bear the suspense no longer, when her quick ear detected the sound of a latch-key being placed in the hall door.

"Whatever has made you so late, Edward?" she asked, rushing forward to meet him, and receive the customary kiss, as he entered the room. "You can't think how nervous I was getting, imagining that you were run over, and all kinds of horrors."

"What a silly girl it is!" he said affectionately; "nought ever comes to harm; you should remember that, old lady, and thus set your mind at ease whenever I am absent," and he kissed her pretty, pouting lips, and was about to enter into an explanation, when, seeing Ada seated at the table with a book before her, from which she merely raised her eyes for a moment when he entered, he motioned to the young girl, making his wife understand that her presence for the time made him silent.

Dinner over, it was not long before Ada was told to retire. She was not looking well, her mother said, and she insisted on her going to bed early; so that when Edward Marston entered the drawing-room, later on, after having smoked his usual cigar, he found his wife the only occupant.

"Ada gone to bed already?" he asked, advancing to where the latter was seated.

"Yes, the child is not looking well," Mrs. Marston replied; "besides I was so anxious to hear," and she stopped, only raising her eyes to her husband's face, that he might understand her meaning.

He moved round to where an easy chair was placed opposite the one she occupied, and seating himself in the same remained for a few minutes silent, as though weighing in his mind how he should commence.

But these moments appearing to the other as ages, she impatiently asked him not to keep her waiting, and then, like one plunging at once into a subject he would fain not have named,—

"Egbert is back!" he said.

Mrs. Marston dropped the screen she had been holding between herself and the fire, the colour forsaking her clear, olive skin, making it look almost ashen, whilst a wild, frightened look came into her velvet eyes.

"Egbert!" she exclaimed, "Egbert alive! How do you know this? Where did you see him?"

"At the office," was the reply. "He did not come up, but sent word that someone wanted to see me. I went, and at first could not recognise in the bent form, the haggard countenance, and bowed head, with its close-cut hair, the man who was once, like myself, a gentleman; but when he told me his name I staggered back, a movement which was not lost on him.

"You need not start, Edward," he said, "my hands are mortal, although rough and bony now, and a ghastly smile played over his sunken features, 'but no doubt you thought me dead.'"

"We all thought so," I answered.

"Yes," he replied, "I would it had been so but for her and Florrie." I saw the tears start to his eyes. "It was only the mistake of a number," he added, and then he held out his hand, but I could not take it, and the manner in which I held back was not lost upon him, as drawing it hastily towards him, "your mother was mistaken, Edward," he said, "surely you do not believe me guilty?"

"How can I think otherwise? I answered,

and was about to turn, when he caught me by the sleeve. "Tell me of her," he asked, "my wife."

"And what did you say?" Mrs. Marston asked, her whole frame shivering with excitement.

"I knew nothing," was the reply, "and then his whole manner changed. He bid me good-bye, and I watched him as he slouched down the street, and became lost in the thick fog. After that it was time to leave the office, so ascending the stairs I locked my drawers, took the keys from the safe, and, putting on my overcoat, was soon on my way home. I had not proceeded far when a beggar addressed me, imploring me, in the name of Heaven, to give him help. We could not see each other in the darkness, but I recognised the voice—it was his."

"I wonder if Laura knows!" Mrs. Marston said; "for if she does, and he goes to her, Heaven only knows what the consequences may be," and she trembled visibly.

Her agitation was not lost on Edward, who sat with his head resting on his hand, staring into the blazing coals, whilst he shared alike the anxiety she expressed.

"But supposing," the former said, after a pause, "he insists on seeing you at your office, to make you account for your trust?"

"He will never have the audacity to push his way in, and I have already given instructions to the clerks that he should not be admitted, whilst Laura being under the same impression as ourselves that he died in prison, it is not very likely he would see her; besides," he added, rising, "it would ruin her in the situation she now holds as companion to Lady Leach did the secret of his crime come out!"

"I believe she would sacrifice everything for his sake, Edward," his wife answered.

"Everything but her pride, Florrie, and although she believed in his innocence, there is no undoing the fact he is a returned convict. No, not depend upon it, Laura would rather rest under the belief she now holds, that his story is buried in his grave, than live in dread of his return, however fondly she may have loved him. In eight years one's feelings become blunted. She was a wild, impetuous girl then; she is a woman now, knowing the world and its prejudices."

Mrs. Marston leaned back in her easy chair, raising her eyes in a dreamlike way to where her husband stood on the rug before her, whilst conflicting emotions passed through her mind. The news he had brought home recalled to her memory the night when, ten years ago, the man whose fate they were now discussing was torn from his hearth and one year bride on a charge of forgery and embezzlement; how that night a baby-girl came to a fatherless home, and a girl of seventeen with dead gold hair wept till her bright blue eyes became dull and red, whilst she alone clung to the belief that he was innocent, although all and everything pointed to his guilt.

Then came the trial, followed by the sentence of ten years' penal servitude, when a woman's scream was heard in that densely thronged court, and Egbert Marston was removed, with that scream re-echoing in his ears, and a dull, dead pain at his heart.

He had but one request to make before he was made to leave this world as completely as though the grave had closed over him—it was to see his brother.

"You will take care of her, Edward," he asked, "and tell her I am innocent, for before Heaven I swear I am," and then the prison gate was shut between him and all, he loved so dearly.

Two years, and there came a letter from the governor of the gaol—Egbert Marston was dead!

CHAPTER II.

BERTIE ORMONDE.

It was from Edward that Laura Heywood first heard of her cousin's decease, and although she never for a moment doubted the truth of his

statement, she still clung to his memory, holding it dear to her heart, disdaining for a moment to attach to it the crime of which he had been found guilty.

It was a shadow which had thrown a gloom over her young life and made her now at twenty-seven a careworn woman, with a sadness which never left the blue eyes, whilst here and there a silver thread was visible amid the wealth of her golden hair.

Lady Leach was a middle-aged widow lady, who loved to have young people around her, and was looked upon in her clique as match-maker in general to all the youth of her acquaintance, and when, ten years since, she engaged pretty Laura in preference to the thirty other young ladies who applied for the situation of companion to her ladyship, it was prophesied that she would marry her off before the twelvemonth had expired.

But, notwithstanding, amid all the suitable young men she mentioned likely to make a good husband for her, Laura preferred to remain as she was, until she had become to be looked on as a fixture in her ladyship's establishment, and an old maid at the same time.

The cold November fog had enveloped everything around the houses in Chester-square, creeping into the luxurious drawing-room in which Lady Leach and Laura were seated, with the same pertinacity that it had filled with a dull haze the less pretentious one in Fulham-place.

There was a weary look on the face of both, for being asthmatical, the former was, owing to the weather, a prisoner within, and her young companion had grown tired over the book she had been reading aloud.

"Put it away, child," her ladyship said, not failing to note the suppressed yawn and falling voice on the part of the other.

"I am rather tired," she answered, closing the volume and advancing to the table where Lady Leach was turning over some photos, "and the fog seems to get down one's throat even here."

"Well, ring the bell, and we will have some tea to wash it away," her ladyship replied, adjusting her glasses that she might better see the picture of a young man she held in her hand, when Laura, having done her bidding, returned to the table.

"I wonder if he is much altered!" the elder lady was saying, more to herself than her companion. "A nice face, isn't it?" and she passed the photo to the latter.

It was that of a man of about twenty-five; the features were handsome, but the lips, one could see, although covered with a heavy moustache, were thin, but this defect was so hidden that had it had not been for the low forehead, from which the hair was brushed back, the face might have been pronounced perfect.

Laura studied it minutely, evidently not with the admiration her ladyship expected her to evince, but with a fascination for which she could not account, and which made her still retain it in her hand when the servant with the tea-equipage entered the room.

"That was taken over ten years ago," Lady Leach continued when her companion, laying it down, proceeded to hand her the tea. "Naturally he will be greatly altered, but as a boy I think Bertie Ormonde was the prettiest lad I ever saw."

"Then you knew him as a child?" Laura said, sipping her tea, and now that she had laid it down, thinking no more of the photo.

"He was my sister's boy," the other answered, "and a nice spoiled boy he was. His father was a solicitor, and the family—our family I mean—looking upon poor Elsie's marriage as a dreadful *misalliance*, she was unnoticed by all but myself, and I could not turn my back on my twin sister, so at her death, which took place within a few years of her wedding life, I promised to act as a mother to young Bertram. I kept my promise, he spending his holidays with me, until he grew up and was taken into his father's office, who would not hear of his following any other profession."

"And he became a lawyer?" Laura asked, handing Lady Leach a silver basket of dainty cakes.

"He would have done so had he remained long enough, but the young scamp grew tired of the office and his father's severity, and one morning decamped, leaving a letter behind him, in which he said he had sailed for Australia; but you have given me no sugar, my dear!" and Lady Leach held out her tiny cup of fine Serras china.

"And never came home after!" Laura asked.

"No, dear," the former replied; "and left only sorrow behind, for just at that time Mr. Ormonde's confidential clerk was discovered to have embezzled over two thousand pounds of his employer's money; and that, added to Bertie's leaving him, so preyed on the poor man's mind that he hanged himself in his own office. I almost wonder you don't remember something of it yourself, for it was in all the papers, and created quite a sensation at the time!"

"I have a faint recollection," Laura answered; "but it is so long ago, and there are so many similar cases in the course of ten years."

Her companion's voice was scarcely audible, and when Lady Leach looked towards her she was leaning back in her chair, her face deadly white, whilst a spasm as though of pain passed over her countenance.

"My dear child, what is the matter? Are you not well?" her ladyship asked.

"Not very," was the reply. "I am afraid my heart is affected, Lady Leach," she replied, and she pressed her hand to her side. "I so often feel a pain here."

"You must see Dr. Matians, dear," the latter replied, kindly, when, Laura having recovered herself, she proceeded to tell her that she expected her nephew to visit her shortly, he having written to say he was about to return to England.

"He will be here by Christmas, I hope," she continued, "and if he is at all the same as he was when he went away, he will be quite an acquisition to our family party."

Some weeks after Bertie put in an appearance with the snow-flakes and coral berries, though Lady Leach could scarcely recognise in the world-worn man the harem-scarem youth, whom she had idolized to a scarce less degree than her twin-sister had done.

Laura was not at home when he arrived, his aunt purposely keeping his advent secret until they met at dinner.

"She is a dear girl and quite a lady," she had told her nephew, when speaking to him of the companion who had lived with her so long; "and I am sure you will admire her, and really you might do worse—" but Bertie burst into his old boyish laugh before she could complete the sentence.

"I see, aunt, you have not forgotten your old calling," he said; "and I wonder what has become of the many young ladies among whom you would have chosen me a wife had I remained in England!"

"Mostly married," his aunt replied; "marriages now with large families and larger waists, and no longer the sylph-like beauties of your dreams."

Bertie laughed again, when the door opened and Laura entered.

Her blue eyes opened in wonderment as she encountered the stranger's gaze, whilst he, after being introduced by his worthy relative, thought for the first time that lady had not exaggerated the charms of her companion.

Laura Heywood was indeed a lovely woman, so different to the meaningless, plink and white faces with which his aunt was usually surrounded, and even at the first his heart seemed drawn towards her in a way he could not understand; and notwithstanding that he entered fully with the latter into reminiscences of the past, laughing at the boyish pranks which she delighted to relate for Laura's benefit, his eyes would constantly wander to the fair face of the latter, whilst not a curve of her figure, or a movement of her graceful form, was lost upon him.

After dinner, during which Bertie amused the ladies with anecdotes of his life in the Antipodes, they adjourned to the drawing-room, Laura singing, while Bertie, passionately fond of

music, drank in the tones of her sweet voice, and Lady Leach dozed in her cosy arm-chair, until the chimes of the ormolu clock striking eleven, her ladyship said it was time to retire, when the piano was closed; the "good nights" were said, and Laura Heywood ascended to her room, to dream of Bertie drawing her towards him with a power she could not resist, and he wondering, whilst smoking his last cigar previous to going to bed, how it was that he, the idol of the most beautiful women he could describe, had never felt towards one of them that feeling so akin to love which he now experienced for his aunt's lovely companion.

CHAPTER III.

AN INVITATION.

It wanted but a fortnight now to Christmas, and Edward Marston had told his wife that he thought it would be a good opportunity to write to Laura, and invite her to spend here with them.

"She will never come, Edward," Mrs. Marston said, "after the way we parted eight years since, and I told her not to enter my doors again."

"It is so long ago now, Florence," her husband replied, "that whatever might have transpired then will no longer be remembered by her; and she will be as anxious to forget past differences as we shall, to ascertain by her presence, if she knows anything of Egbert's return."

"Hardly probable that she is aware of it," the other returned, "and if we can only keep her in ignorance of such we have nothing to fear. But if they should accidentally meet!" and Mrs. Marston shuddered at the thought.

"They would most likely never recognise each other," was the reply.

Some days after, Laura was not a little astonished to receive a letter from her cousin, in which he begged her, in this season of peace and goodwill to all, to forget and forgive past grievances, and, in token of the same, to come and spend the approaching Xuletide beneath their roof.

"You remember little Ada," he wrote; "she is grown quite a great girl now, reminding me so much of you when you were her age, your eyes, your hair—and what beautiful hair it used to be! Well, eight years brings many changes, but I scarcely think it has wrought much alteration in your case. We shall look forward anxiously for your reply, and feeling how unlike it would be to the little cousin I once knew, to refuse to accept the olive branch of peace held out to her. I am sure we can safely rely on its being in unison with our own wishes. With love, in which Florrie joins,—Your affectionate cousin,

"EDWARD MARSTON."

Laura read and reread this strange epistle, so unexpected from a quarter where she had long thought she had been considered as dead; and then, when she recalled their last parting, and the painful truths which had made her rush from Florence Marston's presence, she could scarcely realise the fact that it was Edward who had written that letter, and acting in accordance with the first dictates of her conscience, she had determined to refuse his invitation, when Ada's name, the child she had so madly loved as a girl, altered her purpose, and she decided on obtaining the consent of Lady Leach to make up her mind to pass her Christmas at Fulham-place.

Her ladyship was quite annoyed when she heard of her companion's wish; but eventually, considering it would be selfish in the extreme to refuse, consented, though she declared she did not know how she and Bertie would entertain their guests in her absence. She had been so dependent on Laura for so many years now that her loss, she declared, was but one degree less disastrous than that of her right hand.

"I never will believe that it is only a cousin and his wife who has induced you to leave us now," Bertie said, in an aggrieved tone, when he

had heard of Laura's intention; and finding her engaged in selecting some music for her visit, thought it a good opportunity to endeavour to dissuade her from her purpose.

"What should make you suppose I should state what was not the case?" she asked, looking up from the pile before her.

"Because I believe there is a lover in the background," he answered, irritably; "and that is why you are so distant with me, and want to run away just because I am here!"

"I do not understand you, Mr. Ormonde," she replied, the colour mounting to her temples. "I am only your aunt's companion, a position but a step above a servant, and cannot see in what way my movements can affect you."

"In every way," was the reply, and Bertie moved to where his dark eyes could rest on her face, now bent over the music she was selecting, the colour which dyed her clear skin alone telling that she could not mistake his meaning, when allowing his hand to rest on her tiny white one, and thus interfere with her occupation, "Laura," he said, "I am no longer a foolish youth, who falls in love with the first pretty face he sees. I have gone through that years since, have had beautiful women fall in love with me, who would have given up parents, friends, honour, all for my sake, and I have careessed, even fancied I loved them for the time, but never till I met you did I realize what true love meant!"

"And will find yourself as mistaken as in your former experience, Mr. Ormonde," she replied, coldly, releasing her hand from the pressure of his.

He had waited the effect his confession should have on her, and then a cold, cruel light came into his eyes.

"Never," he answered. "I love you, Laura, loved you from the first, when, on the day of my arrival, you entered this room, and I swear you shall be my wife, or no other man shall claim you."

"Mr. Ormonde!" and she recoiled a step backwards.

His face had become livid with the passion he could so ill conceal, and a cynical smile played around his thin lips, and then his tone changed.

"Forgive me," he said, "I forgot myself, but I was carried away by the force of my feelings, my love for you."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Ormonde," she answered, "and as it is, it is as well that I should go away for a while, when you will think better of what on reflection you will consider your folly. Good-bye!" and she held out her hand. "I hear Lady Leach calling me, good-bye," and she moved towards the door.

"Answer me one question, and you shall go," he said, barring her exit. "Tell me you love no one else!"

"My love is dead," she replied, "and my heart lies buried in his grave."

"And you are going?" he asked.

"To my cousin, Mr. Marston."

"Marston!" he echoed, and then he let her pass, leaving him standing like one transfixed, whilst the perspiration in great beads stood on his forehead.

But Lady Leach entering, he quickly recovered his self-possession.

"Where is Laura?" she asked. "I thought she was here."

"She was a short time since, aunt," he replied.

"Oh! dear, how tiresome," her ladyship replied, "and I wanted her to give her opinion on this lace before she went away. It is most provoking, people whom she hasn't seen for eight years should all at once grow suddenly affectionate, and declare they should be miserable if she did not spend her Christmas with them, and you look, Bertie, as if you were going to be hanged," her ladyship continued, regarding her nephew's white, troubled face. "Whatever is the matter?"

"Nothing with me," the latter answered, moving towards the window, from which he could see a cab draw up to the door, and the cabman shake the snowflakes from his cape, as he stepped with difficulty from his box.

A servant had answered his summons, and was

assisting him in placing a box on the top, when Laura made her appearance.

She was dressed all ready for her departure, and the colour which had forsaken her face returned, dyeing it with deep scarlet, when, advancing to where her ladyship was standing, her eyes met those of her nephew.

But the lady was held out for her inspection, and, after having given her opinion on the same, she bade her an affectionate adieu, Lady Leach with difficulty restraining her tears at the thoughts of what she would do without the girl who had become so necessary to her comfort, whilst Bertie merely pressed her hand, and she left him standing at the window, from which he watched the cab as it bore her out of sight, amid the falling snow.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGER HELP.

THE sound of the departing wheels had long since ceased to be heard, and still he remained unconsciously gazing on the square beyond, where the feathery flakes were steadily gathering over tree and bough, neither hearing nor replying to the comments of his aunt, who had endeavoured to gain an answer from him for the last ten minutes.

"Marston!" he soliloquised; "but what a fool I am to bother myself about a name! There may be a hundred Marstons in the world for all I know; besides, he is—" but here his cogitations ended as Lady Leach, administering rather a hard tap to his shoulder, and asking him in no very pleasant tone whether he was deaf or dumb, reminded him he was not alone.

"Neither, I trust, dear aunt, but why do you ask?" he said.

"Because I have been speaking to you for the last quarter of an hour," her ladyship returned, "without your answering a word."

"I beg your pardon," he replied; "but I was wondering, Miss Haywood having told me she was going to spend her Christmas with a cousin by the name of Marston, whether they were in any way connected with the man who years ago robbed my uncle—for he was a Marston too, if you remember—and it is anything but a common name."

"Good heavens! Bertie," her ladyship, answered, jumping from the chair where she had reposed herself, as though a mine had exploded at her feet. "How can you hint at anything so disgraceful? Laura connected with a convict! Laura cousin to the man who robbed my brother, from whom he had received such benefits! No, no, I cannot believe it," and her ladyship, indeed, looked fit to faint at the mere suggestion; but a servant just then entering with lights she said no more, inwardly determining to learn the truth from Laura herself on her return.

"Should it be the case," she told her nephew a short time later; "much as I regret it Laura must leave. What is bred in the bone invariably comes out in the flesh, and I should never feel comfortable."

Meanwhile the cab conveying the subject of their conversation had arrived at its destination, Mr. and Mrs. Marston ready with open arms to receive their visitor, who could not do otherwise than return the affection with which she was received.

"Are all your traps out, Laura?" Edward asked, when the cabman deposited a basket-trunk on the hall-floor, saying the other was too heavy, he suffering from "rheumatism" as he was, so he had got a chap to help him.

"I think so," the former replied to her cousin's question; "but I'd just see," and she returned to where the rheumatic Jehu with his assistant were with difficulty displacing the box from the roof, it proving almost too much for their united strength.

But they had got it down at last, and she left them to convey it indoors, whilst she gave a last glance within the vehicle to see that nothing remained behind; when, being satisfied on that point, she merely stayed to settle with the

driver, the stranger lingering behind for the trifle he expected to receive.

"Here you are, my man," she said, holding a shilling towards him, but at the sound of her voice he staggered backwards, and as he stood there beneath the gaslight Laura could see that his thin, haggard face had become ashen pale, whilst a gasp as though for breath came from him.

"You are not well!" she said.

"Yes, yes!" he answered hurriedly, and he moved away, when a something in his sunken eyes, in his voice—it was only a memory—but a something which caused her to call him back took possession of her, but it was too late. If he heard he did not trust himself to turn until he was lost to her in the darkness, and she had re-entered her cousin's house.

And then amid the falling snow he retraced his steps to where he had left her, the light from the street lamp letting him see the number of the door through which she had passed, knowing not, taking no heed of the hours as they fled, whilst he remained watching the figures from within, visible on the white blind, with an aching pain at his heart, a yearning to see her face once more, and then he was forced to "move on" by the policeman on beat, little heeding, little caring, whither his footsteps led him.

With Laura the first impression passed which his presence had caused on her mind. She treated it but as a start which a striking resemblance to the dead had caused her; and it was not long on her descending to the Fulham-place drawing-room, after having divested herself of her wraps, before she became quite animated and cheerful beneath the influence of the kindness shown her by Edward and his wife; whilst Ada from the first usurped that love which she had showered on her in her infancy.

"I suppose you don't remember cousin Laura, at all," she asked the child, when later on they were seated at a table, to which the latter had brought some of her drawings for the other's inspection.

"I do a little, but it seemed different," the girl replied; "there were trees, and I can just remember a long garden where you would gather daisies and make chains for me, as we sat on the grass, but I know your eyes quite well. I always thought you must be an angel; they were so blue, heaven-like," and Ada laughed at the recollection of her baby ideas, when Mrs. Marston advanced to where they were sitting.

"You must go to bed now, Ada," she said, "cousin Laura is tired, and to-morrow you can have a long chat together," so kissing the girl's fair face, the latter bade her good night, which was returned lovingly, though not without a feeling of resentment towards her mother for treating her so much like a child.

But it was not long before Laura followed her example. She was, as Mrs. Marston had said, very tired, not so much from the effects of what she had done to weary her as from the strain which unforeseen events had placed upon her nervous system, and she was not sorry when Florence offered to show her to her room herself.

But no sooner was her head with its golden wealth laid on the soft pillow than her eyes refused to close with the sleep she courted; and notwithstanding all her endeavours to the contrary, she would constantly find her mind reverting to the strange man whose haggard face and sunken eyes had so impressed themselves on her imagination.

One—two—three—four—she heard each hour solemnly tolled by the clock of the adjacent church, and then the voices of the Christmas waltz fell on her ear, until, as the gray dawn of the winter's morning entered the apartment, she fell into an uneasy slumber.

She dreamt that the grave of her dead love reopened, and that with cold gaunt arms he had drawn her within, bringing her down, down until her warm breath made the life-blood to flow through his veins, and his eyes unclosed to gaze into hers. They were the eyes of the stranger, and then with a scream she awoke to hear Ada telling her how late it was, and the hot water which the servant had brought her growing cold on the wash stand where she had placed it.

CHAPTER V.

A RENCONTRE.

BREAKFAST over, and Edward gone to his office, Laura with Mrs. Marston and Ada started on a shopping expedition. There was so much to purchase in the way of presents for Christmas, a goodly assortment of which was to be seen at every shop window; besides, there were many things needed for the juvenile party which was to take place on the twenty-third, on which occasion, although Ada was—and considered herself to be—too far advanced in years to do more than distribute the gifts, a Christmas tree on a large scale was always provided.

Laura and the latter were busily engaged in the selection of some trinkets for the same when Mrs. Marston saying that, to save time, she would leave them to conclude their purchases whilst she went to Kuhn's to give her order for lace, etc., left them on the understanding that they were to await her return, as she would not be over an hour away.

The shop was crowded with ladies and children on the same errand, and the prescribed hour quickly passed, Ada exceeding greatly the sum Mrs. Marston had given her to spend; so much so, that Laura found she had not sufficient in her purse to lend her beyond what she herself required.

"We must wait, Ada, till mamma comes," she said, when the young lady behind the counter, taking down the address where the goods were to be sent, said they could be paid for on delivery, but Laura preferred to wait. Another hour passed, and still no Mrs. Marston, until from being fidgety the latter became anxious at her protracted absence.

"I think mamma must have misunderstood us," she said to the child, who was far too engrossed in the examination of the pretty things around her to share her cousin's anxiety.

"I am sure she must have gone home," when giving directions that the parcels should be sent as soon as possible, she was about to lead Ada from the shop when Florence entered.

Her face was ashen pale, and there was a wild, frightened look in her eyes, her limbs evidently shaking beneath her, although she did all in her power to hide her emotion.

"We will take the things with us," she said, when she heard how matters stood, turning to half a passing cab, and then paying the difference, giving directions that they should be placed in the same.

"You get in first," she said to Laura, pushing her forward to where Ada had already taken her place, and then the former saw her take a hasty glance around, as though in fear of being followed, when she entered the vehicle.

There was no allusion made to the cause of her being so long away, further than she supposed they thought she was lost, and after a few moments she so far recovered herself as to talk with Ada respecting her purchases, until, in turning the corner of the street, her manner suddenly changed, the colour left her face, and she hurriedly leant back on the cushioned seat, as though fearful of being seen.

"What is the matter, Florence? Are you not well?" Laura asked, bending forward to render assistance, when she became aware of the figure of a man resting against the letter-box, his eyes apparently fixed on the cab in which they were seated. It was the stranger of the preceding evening, and then a train of wondering thoughts passed through her brain.

Could it be possible that one in his position, whose threadbare coat, and was, haggard countenance bespoke his poverty, could have any influence over her beautiful cousin; but she was aroused from her reverie by the latter asking her to look out and see if any one was following them.

"A good many are, dear!" Laura replied, smiling. "Do you mean anyone in particular?"

"Yes," the other answered. "That man you saw leaning against the post. Did you notice him?"

"I did," her cousin said; "but why should you think he would follow our cab?"

"Because he annoyed me so much by persistently asking me for money to-day that had I

seen a policeman I should have given him in charge," Mrs. Marston answered.

"Poor fellow!" Laura said, "he looks half-starved, but I believe that man has a history. He is the same one who helped to remove my trunk from the cab yesterday, when I came to Fulham place; and when I gave him a shilling for his services he spoke quite like a gentleman; in fact, I thought he was not going to take it!"

But Mrs. Marston had heard no more than that the man she feared was following them had already been to Fulham-place, that he had seen Laura, whose face was one not likely to be forgotten; and then a sickly faintness had overcome her, and she lay back unconscious in the vehicle as they drew up at her own door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHILDREN'S BALL.

To Laura her cousin's indisposition was a mystery, the more so that she felt convinced it was in some way connected with the presence of the man they left standing by the pillar-box; and then she remembered the strange effect his face had had on herself when she first saw him on her arrival at Fulham-place, which only added the more to puzzle her, but as, on the following day, Florence had fully recovered her usual health beyond a slight nervousness, and several others passed without their coming again in contact with the stranger, matters assumed their customary rôle.

It was the twenty-third, the day on which Ada's party was to take place, and so engaged were all in preparation for the same that, for the time, the annoyance of which Mrs. Marston had complained, and to which she ascribed her illness, was entirely forgotten.

A side door leading to the servants' offices and garden at the back of the house was besieged with tradespeople, who during the day delivered goods at that entrance, and at which a van with root-seats, was seen to draw up later on.

"Be sure that door is kept shut," Mrs. Marston told the servants, but notwithstanding, so fully occupied were they, that they invariably trusted to the tradespeople to close it after them, which as usual they never did.

The back drawing-room opened into a conservatory, very small and unassuming, but which was now made to look its prettiest, Chinese lanterns being suspended from the glass roof, falling amid the deep green foliage of the foreign plants placed within, and throwing a subdued light over the varied colours of the exotics still in bloom, whilst they caused the waters of a tiny fountain in their midst to sparkle beneath their rays.

From this were stone steps, leading into the garden, from which all that was passing inside could be seen distinctly.

In the conservatory was placed the tree, filled with every conceivable kind of knick-knacks and bonbons, dolls in fairy costumes hanging by their waists from the branches, to which they were fastened by invisible wires, whilst wax candles and smaller lanterns illuminated the whole.

It wanted but a foot half-hour to the time the guests were expected to arrive—Laura, who was the presiding goddess as far as the arrangements were concerned, having given the final touch to the supper-room, where the table was arranged in exquisite taste.

Mr. and Mrs. Marston, with Ada, had not yet descended from dressing when she entered the drawing-room, and after bestowing a cursory glance in the chimney-glass at her pretty figure, advanced to the conservatory with the intention of further enhancing her charms by the addition of a white camellia, but she had scarcely reached the glass door when she became aware of the figure of a man, crouched amid the flowers.

He turned at the sound of her approach, and the scream she would have uttered died on her lips, which had now become colourless, while she clung to the door for support.

He had risen now from where he had remained concealed by the azaleas, and advancing to where she stood, called her by name.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

"You! Egbert!" she gasped, shrinking from him. "I—was—thought you were dead."

"Rather that I had been so!" he replied, bitterly, "than arise, as it were, from the grave to find how soon I have been forgotten."

"Never by me," she answered, now that the first start his presence had given her was past, holding out her hands to him, and she would fain have drawn him within.

"No, no; such as I must not mix in respectable society," he said, with bitter sarcasm; "but you see I have met with some luck since I helped to remove your boxes;" and he looked down at his dress, which was that of a gentleman. "I happened to tumble across an old friend who had known me before disgrace came. He was the only one to believe me innocent when everything and everyone was against me!"

"Don't say so, Egbert," Laura said, interrupting him. "I always knew that you were guiltless."

"I think you did, little girl," he answered, the memory of that scream in the Court-house returning to him; "but most did not, and amongst them the judge who sentenced me to ten years' penal servitude. However, that is all past now!" he added, brushing his hand across his forehead, as though to banish the horror left by a fearful dream.

"I am in the position of an honest man now in the office of the friend who never doubted me; and yet I felt happier when treading the mill, thinking that each day was bringing me nearer to the wife who, fool as I was, I believed to be mourning my absence. But whose house is this?" he asked, changing his tone; "and what are you doing beneath this roof?"

For the moment Laura was silent. What could she say? To tell the truth would be but to add to the misery of the man before her.

"I am only on a visit," she answered; and then Ada's voice, calling Auntie, fell on her ear, and a tiny fairy in white, with white roses looping up an overskirt of silver gauze, entered the room.

"Whose child is that that she should call you thus?" the man asked, whilst, hidden as he was by the tall azaleas behind which he had again stepped at the sound of approaching footsteps, he could, unobserved, distinctly see the pretty head of the former, with its wealth of golden hair shimmering down her back like burnished gold.

And then a sudden thought took possession of him, and he would fain have pushed his way into the apartment had not a man, entering at the moment through the open door, arrested his footsteps.

"I must see you alone," he had just time to say. "Meet me at the corner, by St. George's Hospital, to-morrow at five o'clock;" and then, stooping so that the plants would hide his movements, he passed from the conservatory, and Laura re-entered the drawing-room, her heart beating almost audibly, and her whole form quivering with fear; when, with the sound of his footsteps falling distinctly on her ear, she turned to meet Edward Marston and Ada.

Edward moved to the spot from whence she had just emerged, peering anxiously where the Chinese lanterns cast their soft light over the quiet green of the broad-leaved plants.

"I could have sworn I saw a man pass into the garden," he said, returning to where Ada was asking her aunt's opinion on her toilette. "You did not notice anyone lurking about, did you?" he added, addressing the latter.

But Laura was apparently too much absorbed in the girl's dress to heed his question; and it remained unanswered when Florence entered the room, and the guests commenced to arrive.

But, notwithstanding her heightened colour, and the animated expression of her countenance as she turned from one to the other, apparently finding as much enjoyment in the amusement afforded the younger members of the party as they did themselves, Laura could detect a certain uneasiness in her cousin's manner, as from time to time she would turn her eyes towards the conservatory; and once, when following the direction of her gaze, she felt assured that someone was stealthily moving within.

"Are you quite sure the side gate was kept

closed according to my orders?" Mrs. Marston asked in an undertone of a servant, who now entered with a tray bearing tea.

The reply of the latter was inaudible, but she could see the face of the former turn a shade paler, and then, as the man moved on, a spasm of fear passed over her countenance.

But the dancing and music which followed for the moment sent other thoughts from her mind, her strange meeting with Egbert in the conservatory was almost forgotten when they had adjourned to the ball-room, where the fairy forms of the juvenile guests whirled in the merry waltz, and the strains of Strauss's dream music filled the apartment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEETING.

THE ball was kept up until an early hour in the cold winter morning, and not before the dull grey streaks of another day had entered within the closed blinds did the last of the guests drive from Fulham place.

"Oh, what a delightful night it was, mamma dear!" Ada said, leaning her golden head on her mother's shoulder. "And I don't feel a bit tired."

"Then your looks belie you, my child," Laura said, as she handed her a cup of coffee from the tray which had just been brought in, and notwithstanding all her assertions, a weary yawn escaped the girl's lips.

But now that they were left to themselves, all interest in the evening's proceedings seemed to have passed.

Edward could not overcome the conviction he had that he had seen a male form peering from among the orchids on the guests assembled in his drawing-room, whilst Mrs. Marston shivered at the possibility that they had been followed on their way from town, and that the man the most feared had been a witness as she moved forward to receive her visitors, Laura alone knowing to the full the extent at which that espionage had arrived, and fearing more than all for the result of future events.

That she would meet Egbert on the evening of the day which had already dawned she had determined. She must ascertain from himself how far his knowledge extended, and do all in her power to avert any consequences which might ensue, were he already in possession of the dread facts.

When she descended from her room between three and four in the afternoon she found Mrs. Marston asleep on the sofa in the drawing-room. Edward was away at his office, and Ada, who was poring over some music, was too weary even to ask to be allowed to accompany her, so kissing the girl's hot lips, and with a laugh telling her how dissipated she looked, she merely said she should not be long, and passed out into the wintry air.

Hailing an omnibus she was soon conveyed to her destination, and as she alighted she found the road thronged with people emerging from the Park, the most part of whom were the skaters, whose glowing faces mingled with others who had been witnesses of the sport they had enjoyed.

Egbert was already at the rendezvous.

"I thought you would not come," he said, as she advanced to meet him, warmly grasping her extended hand. "But come into the Park, I can talk to you better there," and linking her arm within his own he led her through the gates. "I hope you won't be cold; but I see you are well wrapped up," he added, giving a cursory glance at the expensive fur in which she was dressed.

"No; I am not cold," Laura answered, and then they walked on in silence for a short while, until their path became less frequented, and, like themselves, only one or two were strolling leisurely along, seemingly with no purpose in life beyond the killing of its precious moments.

"You did not know who I was on that night when, in a coat not half so reputable as cabbie's himself, I assisted him to dislodge

your box from the roof of his vehicle!" he laughed, as he turned with a sad smile to his cousin.

"No," she replied; "and yet there was something in your face which seemed familiar to me. But, you know, we all thought you were dead, having received the news of your death from the governor of the prison."

"And I suppose you were like the rest, Laura," he continued, "never shed a tear for the dead convict, or put on a scrap of crape for the cousin you once—well, played with when you were a child? But there, don't cry," he said, as he saw the effect of his words. "When the girl who had sworn at Heaven's altar to keep me through good report and evil report, when the wife whose image was ever before me in those long night-watches, when after the day's weary toil I lay upon my wooden bed, ever looking forward to our re-union, as the shipwrecked mariner to the beacon light; in my snatches of sleep ever dreaming of her, in imagination feeling her soft arms around my neck, her warm lips pressed to mine; when, I say, she can forget me, living to look on me in after years as a thing to be deplored, how can I expect others to prove faithful to my memory?"

He paused in the agony of his own feelings, falling to note the suffering which was depicted on the countenance of the girl beside him.

"But who told you that she had ceased to love you, to think of you?" Laura asked.

"I heard it from her own lips," was the reply, "when she threatened to give me in charge if I persisted in addressing myself to her. Well, I suppose it was my fault," he added, "for, in truth, I was a sorry figure, and pride goes a long way with women, I know, and that is why I asked you to meet me, Laura, for I verily believe she really did not recognise me as her husband, and I thought you would tell her how that you had seen me, and tell her gently, dear, that I am still alive, in a position once more to take her to my heart and home, and our baby—a big girl now, isn't she?"

And then he stopped, the picture which he had drawn in his imagination suddenly becoming bleared and daubed as his eyes met those of his companion.

She had sunk on one of the seats beneath the bare branches of a mighty elm, her fair face no less white than the snow which had rested there, her bosom heaving with the emotion of her feelings, whilst her eyes alone told him of the deathblow to his hopes, which she failed in courage to impart to him.

"Then you do not know!" she stammered.

"Know what?" he asked, his whole face quivering with the excitement of his feelings.

And then she told him all, her heart bleeding the while as she noted the agony depicted on his countenance. For the moment that love which she had hoped time and absence had helped her to conquer, rising up in her heart, and then he turned almost fiercely on her in his great grief—on her who would have died to have saved him a little of his dreadful sorrow.

"And the child?" he asked, offering her his arm to lead her from the spot, blind to all as he was but his terrible degradation.

"She is with them," she answered.

He did not reply, but a look she never forgot passed over his features, and he hurried her along, like one mad feeling from a fancied pursuer.

Just then two gentlemen passed, and lifting her head Laura recognised Bartram Ormonde.

He raised his hat, and would have shaken hands, but a sudden turn on the part of Egbert caused him to falter. She noticed him start, and then with a bow he passed on, and Laura heard him say,—

"Only my aunt's companion," in reply to his friend's inquiries as to who his fair acquaintance was.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PRESENTIMENT.

THE next morning Laura received a letter. It was in Lady Leach's handwriting, regretting that

she was unable again to receive her under her roof; but from the questionable society in which she was seen it was utterly impossible that she could do so, albeit that the many years she had been with her rendered the parting most difficult to bear.

She enclosed cheque for twenty-five pounds in lieu of notice, and could do no more than wish her well in the future. Laura read to the end, and then it fell from her hands as the full meaning of its cruel import passed through her mind.

"I do not intend returning to Chester Square," she told Mrs. Marston, who, seated at the breakfast-table, was watching her movements from behind the dressing tea-urn.

"Not return to Lady Leach, Laura! What on earth do you mean?" that lady asked. "Are you going to be married, or what?" and she lifted the cover from a dish of hot rolls.

"Married, Florence—never!" was the reply. "I have suffered too much from the marriages of others ever to commit such a folly myself."

"I do not understand," Mrs. Marston answered, proceeding with her breakfast, but her whole countenance changed when Laura told her that she had seen Egbert, and that it was through being with him in the park the previous day that she had lost her situation.

"And what had that to do with it?" her cousin asked.

Laura raised her eyes, filled with tears, as Mrs. Marston spoke. The latter had fully recovered her self-possession now, and was listlessly toying with her teaspoon, as though Egbert being alive or dead was no concern of hers, whilst the girl continued to relate all that had transpired, from the evening on which he, in his ragged coat, had assisted to remove her luggage, to the time when he made himself known to her on the night of the children's party, and their assignation for the following day.

"You can act as you please, Laura," she said, when the latter ended her narrative. "I shall abide by the belief I hold, that this man is an imposter—a vagabond who, for purposes best known to himself, probably extortion, chooses to parade before us as Egbert, the official proof of whose death I still possess in the governor's handwriting. I can only conclude they were fellow-prisoners, and in that way he has become acquainted with the names and habits of our family; but that he is Egbert himself I will never believe," and Mrs. Marston changed the subject, as the door opening, her husband entered the room; only referring to it later on, by telling her cousin that until she met with another situation she was welcome to make their home hers.

Edward Marston was more than usually grave as he seated himself opposite his wife, who, now that she had, as she considered, disposed of a disagreeable subject in the most satisfactory manner, became quite animated whilst attending to the duties of the table; but, notwithstanding all her efforts, and Ada's merry prattle, they failed to disperse the gloomy thoughts which had taken possession of the former.

Laura had risen from the table, endeavouring to hide her tear-stained face by the cage of a pet canary to whom she gave her undivided attention, unheeding of the conversation carried on by the breakfast trio.

But even Mrs. Marston's voice became more subdued, as she could not fail to notice her husband's nervousness.

"Are you not well, Edward?" she asked, her eyes resting anxiously on the untasted food, allowed to grow cold and unpalatable; whilst he, with a far-away look in his earnest eyes, appeared to be lost in thought.

"Yes, dear!" he replied, making an effort to rouse himself; "but I have a fit of the horrors, a presentiment, a feeling of coming evil, which seems to haunt me; but there, what a fool I am to give a second thought to such nonsense," he added, suddenly changing his manner. "Why even Ada is laughing at me," he continued in a bantering tone, "and I do believe Laura is too," and he turned to where the latter had just moved from the window. "Why no, I declare she is crying!" he said; "and if it were not that you,

Florence, and Ada are in good spirits, I should believe the air was filled with blue devils."

"Your liver out of order most likely, dear," was Mrs. Marston's practical reply, and then, as after looking at his watch, he hastily rose to go to the City, she followed him to the hall, to assist him with his overcoat.

"She knows all," she whispered, jerking her head in the direction of Laura; "they have met, and she has told him everything."

"It is only as I feared," was the reply, and he would have said more, but, Ada opening the door suddenly, he merely kissed his wife, and went out.

And Florence returned to the room where Laura still remained, merely, as she said, to get the morning paper; when, after having secured it, she was about to ring the bell that the table might be cleared, as she heard a key inserted in the street door, and a few moments later Edward re-entered the apartment.

"Have you left anything behind, dear?" she asked, wondering at his return, but he made no answer to her question, only advancing to where she stood, on the soft fleece of the hearthrug; when, drawing her towards him, he gazed long and steadfastly on her upturned face, now wearing a frightened, scared look, and then he pressed his lips to hers.

"Don't be alarmed, darling, if I should be late," he said, and then, with a passionate kiss, he was gone.

But it was some moments before Mrs. Marston recovered the surprise his strange manner had created in her mind, till ascribing the same to the worry and anxiety which recent events had occasioned him, she gave it no further heed, until, later on, her heart was breaking with the terrible sorrow she could not then foresee; and in the agony of her spirit she prayed to be released from a life from which all light and happiness had fled from her for ever.

Ascending to the drawing-room, after the door had again closed on her husband, she seated herself by the cheerful fire, ostensibly to read, but found it impossible to concentrate her thoughts on the topics of the day, as they would wander back to scenes in the past, which recent events had brought so vividly to her remembrance.

She could hear Ada practising in the adjoining apartment, to which the old piano had been lately removed to give place to one of more modern manufacture, and Laura had gone out, after having written a long letter to Lady Leach; whilst she, Florence Marston, was alone, save for a grim spectre which would ever and anon arise before her, telling her but too truly that "Nemesis" was on her track.

And yet, vain, selfish as she was, there was a time when she had been deceived, and the true, trusting girl became a hard, designing woman, hoping, praying when but twenty to be released from the man who called her wife, when each day her fetters became to her as grips of iron, and she chafed against the chains which bound her.

The only child of indulgent parents, in her childhood knowing no restraint, studied in every whim, at eighteen Florence Byron was a spoiled beauty, the very possession of the latter, in an extreme, gaining for her from strangers the same worship with which the former regarded her.

It was then that she was introduced to the Marstons, a family which had at that time come to live in the neighbourhood, their father having succeeded Dr. Postle, the late practitioner in the parish.

From the friendship which soon grew between the two families the young people were much thrown in each other's society, until ultimately, from the admiration with which it was evident the elder brother regarded the beautiful girl, he began to hope for a nearer and dearer tie.

But unknown to him Edward had already pledged his cause, and gained the affections of Florence, who with the consent of the parents of each, accepted him as her future husband.

Egbert feeling himself aggrieved not only at the refusal he had met with, but at, as he termed it, being kept in the dark with respect to his

brother's engagement, a coolness amounting almost to enmity arose between them, and he determined to leave Boreham, the home of both, to pursue his studies for the bar, to which he was destined.

But the image of the girl he had left in the quiet village was ever present with him, until his love became almost a madness, and the idea of leaving no stone unturned to prevent her union with Edward entered his brain.

The opportunity came, when he least expected it, at a garden party to which he was invited, the latter was present, a circumstance which caused him no little surprise, being in ignorance that he was even in London.

"Well, who should have thought of meeting you here, Edward," he said, holding out his hand to the other, who with a lady on his arm was sauntering a little away from the other guests.

"I have been in town for the last three months," he said, "and it is a wonder we have not tumbled against each other before;" then turning to his fair companion, "allow me to introduce you to Miss Hazlewood," he said, "her mother was our mother's dearest friend."

He acknowledged the introduction, continuing to walk by their side for awhile, until meeting others they became separated.

"They will make a splendid pair!" Egbert overheard one dowager tell another, referring to Edward and his fair companion. "Well, Mattie might do worse. Mr. Marston is a fine young fellow, and is very clever in his profession, I understand."

"But I thought he was engaged to a girl in the country?" the other replied. "I saw her once when staying at Boreham Hall; she was pointed out to me, a lovely creature, with eyes soft as a gazelle's, and the most perfect face I think I ever saw."

"A boy and girl attachment most likely, nothing more," and then they turned to speak to a gentleman who at that moment approached.

The next day Dr. Marston received a letter, informing him that Egbert, being far from well, had made up his mind to spend a short time at Boreham.

He had not been long at his father's residence before Florence was made aware of the fact; and when they met, he being the first to name Edward, she thought he had wisely forgiven the wrong he considered his brother had done him, as she made numerous inquiries respecting her absent lover.

But unfortunately for Egbert, the more he was in the society of the beautiful girl, the stronger his love became for her, until in an evil moment he told her of the conversation which had reached his ears that day of the garden party, how he had noticed himself the admiration and attention bestowed on Miss Hazlewood by his brother—so much so, that he had come to the conclusion that their engagement was broken off; and as he marked the effect of his words on the jealous temperament of Florence, he fanned the flame already ignited, until but a few weeks elapsed before she was led to the altar by Egbert himself, her heart bleeding the while for the man who even in his faithfulness she alone loved.

Then came a year to her of wedded misery, which all the love, the efforts made by her husband to make her happy, could not avert, until, when her babe was born, she prayed for death.

Laura Heywood, the brother's cousin, was the only one who knew that her love for Edward had never died; and then came the story of her husband's crime, his arrest, and conviction, followed shortly after by the rumour of his death, and not till then did the cloud of melancholy which ever rested on the brow of the young wife become lifted.

She and Edward met once more, and she learnt for the first time of the guilt of the dead man which had separated them, and then she became the wife of her former lover.

Eight years had passed since then, and she never repented the step she had taken, and now she rebelled against the fate which had caused

the man she had almost ceased to remember to arise between her and her happiness.

Unconscious of the treachery which had been practised on himself, it was at Egbert's own request that Edward had promised to watch over his wife and child at the time of his condemnation, and not until the supposed death of his brother did Florence confess to him the wrong that had been done.

And now Mrs. Marston sat gazing into the blazing coals, unconscious of all but her sad thoughts, wondering in her mind what the end would be, when a slight sound aroused her from her reverie. The door was gently opened, and pale and haggard, with dishevelled hair, his eyes starting from their sockets, whilst his countenance was pale as death, she turned to face the man she most dreaded to see—Egbert himself!

(Continued on page 256.)

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT SHE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO UNDO.

FOR several succeeding days after the events just recorded, Elsie's life at Maltby Grange passed uneventfully enough; the projected dinner and dance at the Barlstones' did not come off, and nothing unusual occurred.

Mrs. Penfold shut herself up a good deal in her own room with her maid, who was in her way quite as peculiar as her mistress.

She was an old woman, being close upon sixty, and there was something weird and witch-like in her dark, yellow face.

Her features were sharp, regular, and clearly cut; her thin lips closed tightly over her small, yellow teeth; while her pointed chin, her sharp nose, and her keen, piercing black eyes gave her the appearance of one who knew much more than the majority of her sex; of one, indeed, who could see things usually hidden from the ken of ordinary mortals.

At Maltby Grange none of the servants took a liking to Nan Perran, nor she to any of them. While at Trebartha, she was both shunned and feared; the simple Cornish folk believing, without hesitation, that she had certain dark dealings with the Evil One.

She was a silent woman, rarely opening her lips unless directly addressed, and she and her mistress seemed to live together rather from the force of habit than from any mutual liking.

To Elsie this woman was an enigma and, it must be confessed, an object of secret dread.

She had been at first struck by the manner in which Perran had stood staring at her instead of attending her unconscious mistress; and now, whenever they met, the singular being seemed unable to remove her eyes from the beautiful face of the embarrassed girl.

It is not pleasant to be regularly stared at by the same person without any apparent cause for the objectionable attention; and Elsie, after having at first been troubled by this behaviour, had at length felt some resentment at it.

She never said a word to this effect, but there was something in her glance, and in the way in which she held her head when the woman's eyes were fixed upon her, which soon revealed to Nan Perran the feelings with which the young lady regarded her.

To Elsie's intense relief she was not persecuted by Clarence Maltby's attentions during these few days.

She took very good care now not to give him an opportunity of speaking to her alone; and he, from prudential reasons, did not venture to excite his mother's anger by being more than just civil to the secretary in her presence.

Once, indeed, our heroine had seen him slip a letter between the leaves of a book she had been reading; but as he found it unopened and in the same place the next morning, he quietly destroyed it himself probably thinking that it

would be undesirable for it to fall into the hands of his mother.

So the days slipped by, until the guests whom Mrs. Maltby had invited for various lengths of time, extending from a day to a fortnight, began to arrive.

First of all came Charlie Birch.

To her had been given the longest invitation, and most of the other guests were vaguely supposed to be coming to help to entertain her.

She was not in very good spirits, however, for the Barlstones had gone to Scotland; she would return to her own house in Devonshire when she left Maltby Grange, and Mrs. Maltby would scarcely have felt flattered if she had known that Charlie only fulfilled her promise of coming here for Elsie's sake.

So she told herself, at least; but it is quite possible that the hope that she should meet Harry Kingswood, and should spend some time under the same roof with him, was not without its influence in bringing her here.

Not that she would have admitted this to herself for a moment; but there are some feelings that will not be stifled, and that will insist upon asserting themselves, however much we may try to close our eyes to their existence.

Perhaps this was the reason that Charlie found life at the Grange so very slow and uninteresting until Harry Kingswood arrived. Certain it is that her spirits rose considerably from that time.

Lionel Denison's friend was bright, cheerful, and handsome; to use his own expression, he "thought Charlie Birch was very good fun," and he rather enjoyed the privilege of carrying on a more or less serious flirtation with her.

But he was not going to allow Miss Birch to monopolise him.

She was a charming girl in her way, and her attractions were in nowise diminished by her very handsome fortune; but though Kingswood was not a wealthy man he had enough to live upon, and there was an old uncle in the background, rolling in wealth, and a martyr to the gout, who might take it into his head when he departed this life to provide so well for Harry that a fortune with a wife would not be absolutely necessary.

Such was the condition of affairs when Harry Kingswood came to Maltby Grange on a visit for a week.

He was not positively in love with Elsie, and he was still less so with Charlie Birch, and it is quite possible that he might not have lost his heart to his friend's ward if the girl herself had not been so calmly indifferent to him.

There are some men who never value what is won easily, or what may be had for the asking.

Also, there are some men who seem to delight in breaking the tenth commandment, and who not only covet their neighbours' goods, but try to get them also.

It was rather ungrateful of Kingswood to try to win for himself the prize for which Lionel Denison was seeking, and he felt this more than once, though he easily soothed himself with the reflection that all is fair in love and war.

Be this as it may, he never breathed a hint to his friend about having, as he believed, discovered Elsie's whereabouts; and when he said good-bye to him at the conclusion of his protracted visit to the Hermitage he was hypocritical enough to express a hope that the lost girl would soon be found.

He felt rather small, however, in his own estimation when he had done this, and the sensation of self-humiliation was an unpleasant one, for he was one of those men who cared less for the opinion of the world than for the approval of his own conscience.

The very outrage to his own esteem which he thus committed made his pursuit of Elsie a doubly dangerous pastime, and caused his behaviour to seem quite inconsistent to Charlie, who was the one interested watcher of the play.

As for Elsie herself, she desired not the admiration of any man.

Sorrow had touched her young life with gloom at that critical moment when she was

Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet
Womanhood and childhood feet.

The future for her had henceforth a mystery in it, not unfigured with tragedy.

Therefore, the adulation of these two men who hovered about her was but like the buzzing of unpleasant flies about her head; and though she tried to be patient with Kingswood, in consideration of his being Lionel Denison's friend, she was now more glad than hitherto to retire to the study and try to write out in tolerable English some adventures in Ireland which Mrs. Maltby had once committed to paper.

It was not interesting work, but it was better to be here than to take her place among the guests, making Charlie Birch jealous by the way in which Kingswood bent over her, and talked in low tones in her ear, or startling Mrs. Maltby into flashing her big, black eyes upon her, as some word or glance from Clarence warned the suspicious mother that there was danger ahead.

As lookers-on usually see most of the game, so Mrs. Penfold, when she did condescend to join the rest of the company, amused herself, in her own grim way, by watching these four people when they were most unconscious of her observation.

Innocence and indifference were about the best safeguards that a girl in our poor heroine's position could have; and the old lady, who had been a beauty herself in her own day, and had known what temptation meant, could not but marvel at the calm dignity with which this young girl went through her daily tasks.

To an outsider it was wonderful how she helped to entertain the company with her fresh, sweet voice—was seemingly content to be one in any party of pleasure, or to be left out of it; and yet how steadily she ignored the infatuation and the jealousy of each other which Kingswood and young Maltby daily found it more difficult to hide.

Mrs. Maltby was, perhaps, a little more blind than usual at this time, by reason of the fact that she had managed to gather together a good many rather incongruous people under her roof.

A few evenings after his arrival she took Kingswood by the arm, and walking with him to the end of the long drawing-room, said mysteriously,—

"You see that fair florid man with the spectacles on? That is Major Golf."

She spoke in such a singular manner, and there was something so very unromantic about the good-looking, middle-aged German whom she thus pointed out, that Kingswood felt impelled to ask, jestingly,—

"And who is Major Golf?"

"You have never heard of Major Golf?" asked the lady in real or affected surprise. "His name is known everywhere; there is not a throne in Europe that does not tremble at his name. It was he who planned the death of the Emperor of Russia!"

"Good heavens, madam! You don't mean to say that you allow a miscreant like that to sit under your roof!" cried Kingswood, in genuine dismay. "Surely you cannot know what you are doing!"

"*C'est mon affaire!*" retorted the lady, angrily.

And she relinquished his arm, spread out her hands, and made a mock obeisance; then turned away, leaving him dumb, for the moment, with amazement.

"By Jove! this is about the oddest thing I ever heard of," muttered the young man, as soon as he recovered the use of his tongue. "I suppose I have received my *congé* because I have dared to express my disapproval of assassination. Well, I don't much care; they are a queer lot here, and I'm watched so jealously by Charlie, and by that coarse brute Maltby, that I can't get a word alone with Elsie. She won't be here long, that's quite clear, and I can precipitate matters at any time by letting Denison know her whereabouts."

Then he made his way to the side of Miss Birch, said a few words to her in a low tone, and,

despite her flushed face and her evident protests, he shook hands with her, and slowly and carelessly walked out of the room.

In the hall, just as he was about to ascend the stairs, he met Elsie, who was leaving the study, and his whole manner changed.

He came eagerly to her side, and said, in quick, earnest tones,—

"I am going away, Miss Heath, I am glad to be able to say good-bye to you, but I hope we shall soon meet again."

He took her hand as he spoke, and held it, while she looked at him in surprise with widely opened eyes as she repeated,—

"Going away! I thought you were to stay till the end of the week!"

"So did I! but I am dismissed. You will think of me sometimes, won't you? and—may I write to you? Will you answer my letters if I do write?"

"Oh no; I have neither time nor inclination for correspondence on my own account," she replied, trying to withdraw her hand.

But he held it firmly—bent over and pressed it to his lips; then, seeing that he had made her angry, he released the hand and tried to murmur an apology, but she turned away without a word, and retreated to the study. And he, turning quickly round to ascend the stairs, came face to face with Clarence Maltby.

This young man had been sent to the guest by his mother to apologise for her hasty speech, and to beg that he would not think of going away, for to be inhospitable was utterly foreign to the nature of the mistress of this house.

The sight of Kingswood kissing Elsie's hand, however, was quite enough to excite the son, and to drive all other thoughts from his mind; and, losing control of his temper as he met his rival's face, he demanded,—

"Was it Miss Heath's hand that you kissed?"

Kingswood was no coward, quite the reverse; and in any personal encounter he would, he well knew, be more than a match for the rather flabby young man who had been tied too much to his mother's apron strings to excel in any athletic exercise.

The prospect, also, of being able to relieve his mind by a few disagreeable remarks was irresistible, and he now looked at his interlocutor coolly, and even insolently, as he replied calmly,—

"It was, sir. Have you any objection to my kissing that lady's hand?"

"Objection! I should think I have; it's like your impudence. She is my mother's secretary, she is under our protection, you have no right to insult her."

"Pray don't excite yourself, my good fellow. I am about the last man in the world to insult Miss Heath, and I don't think, if she had a choice in the matter, she would select you as her champion. Good night, give my compliments to Mrs. Maltby, and tell her that I am sorry I ever consented to become her guest."

Then he went up the stairs, leaving Clarence standing in the hall, a prey to conflicting emotions.

He had been angry with his mother when Charlie Birch told him what had happened, and Mrs. Maltby was so far penitent that she had sent him to detain the parting guest.

But after this exchange of civilities between Kingswood and himself, he felt it to be impossible to ask the man to stay, while it was likewise very certain, to his own mind, that no amount of eloquence on his part would be able to heal the breach thus made.

"Hang the fellow!" he muttered, savagely; "he did not come at my invitation, and 'tisn't I who've sent him away. Let him go, the coast will then be more clear for me. But she's a horrid little flirt, and I'll tell her so. Letting him kiss her hand indeed. It's more than I've ever been able to do. But I'll just have a talk with her. I've got my lady in a corner at last!"

So saying, he opened the door of the study very gently, and walked in.

The gas was turning low; the fire, which was quite unnecessary at this time of the year, had long since burned out, but besides himself, the room was destitute of a living occupant.

This room was one of a long suite, and besides the door leading from the hall, which was opposite the windows, there were two other doors facing each other, one of which led to a small library, while the other communicated with a little drawing-room, which again led into a larger one, so that anyone could walk the whole length of that side of the house without coming into the hall or passages.

In this way Elsie had gone without his seeing her, and when he reached the room in which the guests were assembled he found her seated at the piano, playing the accompaniment to a song for the florid German whom Mrs. Maltby had spoken of as Major Golf.

He seemed a very harmless conspirator if one might judge by the outer man.

He sang a good song, and, despite his bulk, he was a very desirable partner for a waltz.

If he held extreme opinions he was always careful not to ventilate them; but he was intelligent, well informed, and he spoke sensibly and moderately, like a man who had some respect for the opinions of other people.

"Oh! he does all that to mystify you," Mrs. Maltby explained to one incredulous guest, and she did not convince her listener that the Major was a dangerous character, when, the following day, he drove to a very small house in Fulham, where "the disturber of the peace of Europe" lived with his widowed sister.

But we have nearly done with Mrs. Maltby's crotchets.

They are only interesting in so far as they influence the destiny of our heroine, and matters are coming to a crisis on her behalf with alarming rapidity.

For the rest of that evening Clarence kept as close to Elsie as though he had been her shadow.

Talk to whom she would, sit where she would, go where she would, there he was close by her side, not always looking at her, not even as if he were keeping guard over her, but there he was all the same.

Charlie Birch likewise was not quite herself this evening.

Her eyes were brighter than usual.

The colour of her cheeks was more vivid than it was wont to be, and there was an air of repressed excitement about her which Elsie could not fail to observe.

"I will come to your room before I go to bed; wait up for me," she whispered to our heroine, as the party was breaking up for the night, and Elsie promised to do so.

But she had to wait up for another reason than this.

Mrs. Maltby, who was the most uncertain creature under the sun, took Elsie's arm, made her come to her room with her, and kept her there for a long while, talking about those Irish adventures, while the lady's-maid loosened her hair and disrobed her.

At length the girl was free, and she hurried along the corridor to the foot of a flight of stairs which led to the next floor, upon which was her room.

The gas had been turned out, and the servants had retired to their own part of the building, but Elsie knew the stairs well, and she was just about to ascend them when she was caught in the strong arms of a man, who tried to cover her mouth with his hand, while he said, in a low whisper,—

"It's my turn now!"

Elsie recognised the voice, and the wild terror that came over her knew no control.

With a strength that surprised Clarence, she struggled in his grasp and uttered a loud, piercing shriek, which had echoed through the whole house before he could silence her.

"It's all up now," he muttered, as he heard his mother's door opened; "you've done tonight, my girl, what you'll never be able to undo."

CHAPTER XIII.

DISMISSED.

ELISE fled to her own room, still under the influence of that wild terror which had seized her when Clarence Maltby caught her in his arms.

In this frame of mind she was mad enough to have flung herself from the topmost window to the ground, or to have courted death in any shape, however terrible, so that she might escape from the grasp of the man who inspired her with such agonising fear.

Now, the moment she entered her room she closed the door, looked at frantically, and then, panting and out of breath, she flung herself by the side of the bed, trembling in every limb like a hunted fawn.

"What is the matter?" asked a voice that was familiar to her. "Why have you looked me in?"

It was Charlie Birch who spoke. She had been waiting here, wondering how much longer Mrs. Maltby would keep Elise, and as she felt too restless and too impatient to read, the time had passed but slowly with her.

The loud shriek that had reached her ears, followed immediately afterwards by Elise's sudden appearance and agitated behaviour, told Charlie pretty plainly what had happened; and she now tried to soothe the excited girl, begging her to be calm, and not to rouse the whole household.

But this was just what Elise had done. Few of the guests had retired to rest, though they had gone to their rooms; and now there was a sound of the opening of doors, and a general murmur of voices; but these soon subsided, and Charlie and Elise thought that the alarm was over, when the handle of the bedroom door was turned sharply, as though by one having authority, and the voice of the mistress of the house said peremptorily,—

"Open the door—admit me at once!"

"I will unlock it," said Charlie, in a low tone, and she rose and did so.

Mrs. Maltby swept into the room, wearing a long, cardinal-coloured dressing gown, and with her long black hair streaming down her back.

Her eyes first rested upon Elise, who was sitting upon a couch looking at her.

But the poor girl's face was very pale with agitation, and her dark eyes appeared larger than usual; while the quivering of her sweet lips showed that she was still greatly unnerved.

Without taking any notice of Charlie, whom she pretended not to see, though it was she who closed the door behind her, the mistress of the house advanced to the middle of the room; and extending her hands—palms outward, in a manner peculiar to herself, and as though she were demanding something—she asked in what she intended to be a crushing tone,—

"And pray, Miss Heath, what do you mean by rousing my household, disturbing my guests, and creating such a disgraceful scandal under my roof?"

Elise was so amazed at this attack that she sat speechless, her eyes widely opened, and her lips slightly parted, gazing in dismay at the strange angry woman before her.

From such an attack as this she could not defend herself.

Homeless and friendless, her maidenly modesty outraged; insulted, and reviled because she had dared to utter a protest against her cowardly assailant, the poor girl felt as though her very heart would break, and as though death were her only refuge from the scorn thus poured upon her.

For a few seconds there was silence. Charlie Birch wished Elise to defend herself; but seeing that she could not do so, and judging rightly that if left alone only further insults and contumely would be showered upon her, she coolly walked to the side of the ill-used girl; and having herself no fear of Mrs. Maltby, she looked calmly at that lady, and said quietly,—

"I presume, madam, that Miss Heath objected

to be made the sport of a libertine, even under your roof."

"Thank you, Miss Birch. I am demanding an explanation from my secretary—not from you!" retorted Mrs. Maltby, frigidly.

If only this scene had taken place in Charlie's room instead of Elise's, Mrs. Maltby would have ordered the latter to retire to her own chamber; but she could not very easily order her guest to leave the room, and that guest showed no intention of doing so.

Elise had gained courage by Charlie's championship; but she might not have tried to defend herself if she had not found her friend snubbed; the feeling, however, that she could not allow another to suffer in her stead nerved her to say, simply and timidly,—

"As I left your room, Mrs. Maltby, and just as I got to the foot of this staircase, your son caught me in his arms and tried to kiss me. I was so frightened that I shrieked as loud as I could for help, and he let me go. But—but I can't bear it any longer, he makes my life a burden to me!"

"A burden to you!" repeated Mrs. Maltby, with infinite scorn; "a burden to you, when you have used every art of which you are mistress to entangle him into a shameful marriage—he makes life a burden to you!"

"I entangle him! I want to marry him!" repeated Elise, in utter amazement.

"Yes, you!" blazed out the infuriated mother.

First an expression of intense relief, then a smile came over our heroine's face, clearing away the clouds of perplexity and trouble that had hung over it, and in a quiet but earnest tone she said,—

"You may believe me or not, madam, but there is no form of death so painful that I would not rather suffer than become your son's wife."

"Bah!" cried the elder woman, furiously. "You say that to throw dust in my eyes."

"I say it because it is true," was the passionless answer.

"And I quite sympathise in the sentiment," here interposed Charlie Birch incisively. "I cannot understand that a greater misfortune could befall any woman than to become Clarence Maltby's wife."

"Do you forget that I am his mother?" demanded that lady indignantly.

"No, I don't forget it, but you have my sincere sympathy under the circumstances," replied Charlie.

And, as she looked at Mrs. Maltby not a muscle of her face moved; she might have meant every word that she said, literally; and it was not unlikely that she did so.

Her hostess fixed her big rolling eyes on the heiress for a second or two, then she breathed a deep sigh, and addressing her secretary she said coldly and formally,—

"You will leave my service to-morrow morning, Miss Heath, and you will not come to my table again. Your breakfast will be brought here when you ring for it, and if you come to my study at ten o'clock I will pay whatever is due to you."

Then she turned on her heel, as though she had stood on a pivot, and swept out of the room, leaving the door wide open, and taking no notice whatever of the daring girl who had expressed pity for her.

Elise sat helpless, with clasped hands and bowed head.

She would be only too glad to get away from Maltby Grange, but whither should she go?

Isolt Greatrex was abroad, and though she now longed, beyond the power of words to express, to return to the Hermitage, she at the same time felt that such a step on her part would be impossible.

If her feelings now had only been what they were when Edith Gray surprised her with Lionel's letter in her hand, then she might have gone back, if only to have asked if she had done wisely or not in coming away; and whatever the answer had been, she might have accepted such help, as advice with regard to her future, and a kind word to friends would have been to her.

But this could not be now.

She had stood where the brook and river met; she had called upon the wider and the deeper stream; and love, with all its wonderful possibilities, its bright sunshine and its dark shadows, had taken possession of her soul.

It was not the love of a child for a father, or of a sister for a brother.

Even she, with all her ignorance of the world, with all her innocent simplicity, felt that her love was not a feeling to be openly avowed, but one to be hidden deep in her heart, the very secret of its existence to be guarded, if need be, with her life.

So here she sat, crushed and silent, wishing, with all her innocent simplicity, that her life, with all its miseries, was at an end.

She was startled from this condition of depression by hearing Charlie Birch laughing heartily, as though something very comic had taken place.

"What a fine piece of acting!" remarked Charlie, in answer to Elise's look of reproach. "It's a pity she had such an unappreciative audience. Judging from the scene we have just witnessed, you would imagine that all that anger and indignation was real, wouldn't you?"

"Of course I should," replied Elise, with a glance of surprise; "it seemed very real to me."

"Of course, there was the talent displayed in it. If you had thought that the same scene with variations had been rehearsed half-a-dozen times at least for the benefit of half-a-dozen successive unfortunate secretaries, you would not take the matter so very much to heart, my dear, neither would you trouble yourself to remember Mrs. Maltby's sharp words."

"No, I suppose not," replied Elise, slightly brightening as she spoke. "I remember now that all of the secretaries who have been here that I have heard mentioned were said to be anxious for Mr. Maltby to marry them."

"Of course, dear; that is a very euphemistic way of putting it. The same will be said of you, no doubt."

"Oh, I hope not. The very thought is intolerable!" exclaimed our poor heroine, quickly.

"My dear, what does it matter?" retorted Charlie, carelessly, though with much contempt in her voice. "No one will believe it, any more than they believe nine-tenths of the rest of the rubbish that Mrs. Maltby talks. But enough of this. We have the future to think of, rather than the past or the present."

"Yes," assented Elise.

But here she paused, because the future to her was like an unopened book, the very clasp of which she knew not how to undo.

"You leave here to-morrow," remarked Charlie; "so do I; we shall go at the same time."

"But why are you leaving?" asked Elise. "I hope I have not shortened your stay?"

"Oh, dear, no; I came here to-night to tell you that I was going away, and I was waiting to do so when this little episode occurred. It is impossible for me to remain longer as the guest of a lady who literally turns out of her house a gentleman whom I introduced to her."

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Elise, not understanding her.

"Of Mr. Klogwood. Didn't you hear of it?"

"No. I knew that he was going away," replied Elise, blushing, and feeling vexed at doing so. "He met me in the hall as I was leaving the study, and he said good-bye; but I did not understand why he went away so hurriedly, though I believe he did say something about an assassination."

"Oh, you met him, did you?"

And Charlie's voice changed in spite of herself.

But she conquered her transient jealousy, and bravely resolved that, even if it were well founded, it should not make her be one whit the less a true friend to Elise.

"Yes," was the answer; "I saw him for a second or two, but Mr. Maltby joined us, and I left the two gentlemen, and went to the drawing-room."

"Ah, then, you don't know what happened?"

Then Charlie described the conversation con-

cerning Major Golf, and added that she herself spoke to Mrs. Maltby about Mr. Kingswood.

"She said she didn't mean to drive him away," continued Charlie; "but she did it all the same, and I shall leave this house early in the morning. I would have gone to-night, only it is so late."

Elise made no answer, Mrs. Penfold's offer of taking her as a companion flashed through her mind, and though she shrank with unaccountable repugnance from accepting it, she scarcely knew what else to do.

"If you have no other engagement you had better come with me," remarked Charlie, kindly. "I have a very nice house of my own in Devonshire, where I shall go when I leave here, and I shall be very glad, indeed, of your society. I have a female dragon, who lives with me for the sake of appearances, but she is awfully dull, and her conversation consists of little more than the county history from early morn to dewy eve. You will live a very quiet life with me, but I don't think you will be uncomfortable, and we shall get a few dances between this and Christmas."

"Oh, you are most kind!" responded Elise, while tears of gratitude sprang to her eyes. "If you will let me stay a little while with you I shall be very thankful; but I will not be a burden to you long, and I cannot afford to spend an idle life."

"Burden! Nonsense, my dear! You won't be any burden; you will be a great comfort to me. My she-dragon gets a hundred a year, and you will get fifty if you will accept it, for amusing me; that will buy you gloves and boots. And now I really must go to bed. Is it settled? Will you go home with me to-morrow?"

"I shall be only too thankful to do so," was the grateful reply.

"Then good-night." So saying, Charlie kissed her, and went off to her own room, leaving poor Elise a prey to so many conflicting emotions that she was only too glad to put her head on her pillow, and leave her packing, with all other things of the morrow to take care of themselves.

Strangely enough, too, after all the agitation and excitement of the day, she slept peacefully enough, and when she awoke in the morning her first thought was that of wonder as to what good fortune had befallen her.

She was not long in realising that it was the delight of feeling that she was going away from Maltby Grange that had such a wonderful effect upon her spirits.

Before she had finished packing up all her belongings, Charlie came into her room, and greeting her with a bright smile, said,—

"I am going down to breakfast, and I probably shall not see you till we are ready to go, but I shall wait for you, and we will drive to Paddington and get luncheon there before we start for Devonshire. I have written out a telegram to tell them to send the carriage to the station to meet us."

"Thank you, that will be delightful!" responded Elise.

Then she observed in a more nervous tone,— "I am rather dreading my meeting with Mrs. Maltby in the study at ten o'clock."

"You need not, you have done no wrong!" asserted Charlie, promptly; "and I mean to let the people here know before I go away. I mean to announce at the breakfast-table that you are going with me. By-the-way, have you rang for breakfast as you were desired to do?"

"No, thank you; I don't want any," was the timid reply.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Birch, promptly.

Then she walked to the hall-rop, pulled it sharply, and when a servant appeared, she told the woman to bring Miss Heath's breakfast as soon as possible, and to let it be a good one, as they were going on a long journey together.

"And mind you eat your breakfast," cautioned the heiress when the servant had gone; "The idea of you thinking of fasting; of course you would have wept when you got to the study from

nervous exhaustion, and Mrs. Maltby and her cub would have triumphed over you. There goes the gong!"

Then Miss Birch went down to breakfast, but Elise's morning experience had only just begun.

Breakfast came and she tried to eat, though not with much success, and she was rising from table when her door opened without ceremony, and Mrs. Penfold walked in as though it had been one of the ordinary sitting-rooms.

Elise was surprised and perhaps a little amazed, but she remembered her dependent position, and now she was going away she experienced a feeling of kindness to the old lady who had behaved so oddly to her, so she said "Good-morning," offered her a chair, and then waited to hear why she had come.

"Is it true that you are going away, Miss Heath?" asked Mrs. Penfold, fixing the girl with her sharp, steady eyes.

"Yes," was the quiet reply; "I am going away this morning."

"If you would like to stay I will make things straight for you," was the next astonishing remark. "Clarence shall go away for a week or two, and his mother shall send for you to write her letters as usual."

Elise was surprised, though she knew enough of this strange household to believe that it was quite possible for her visitor to do all this.

The chance of freedom, however, was too alluring to be relinquished, and she replied, quietly,—

"Thank you, I am very glad to go. It would be impossible for me to stay here after what Mrs. Maltby said to me last night."

"Very well, then, you must come with me. I'll take you to Trebartha, and I'll show you something that will astonish you. By-the-way, what is that white mark on the side of your neck?"

And she held the girl firmly while she examined a white scar just behind the left ear.

"I don't know. I suppose I must always have had it," replied Elise, surprised, and a little alarmed at the old lady's strong grasp.

"Ah! if that had been the sight of an inch deeper you wouldn't have troubled Clarence Maltby or me either," said Mrs. Penfold, absently, as she turned to leave the room.

"I cannot go to Trebartha with you," said Elise, firmly.

But Mrs. Penfold seemed not to hear her, and though the girl repeated the assertion, her words appeared to fall upon deaf ears.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLARENCE GOES TOO FAR.

"THERE is the amount due to you, Miss Heath, including payment for a month in advance instead of a month's notice."

And as Mrs. Maltby said this she pointed to a small pile of gold which stood upon the table.

"Thank you," said Elise, humbly, as she took the coins in her hand.

She would have liked to decline the month's payment instead of notice to quit. But she dared not.

For the moment it seemed as though the clouds that hung over her chequered life had broken, leaving a glimpse of a brighter day beyond; but she knew quite well that, however fond she might be of Miss Birch, or Charlie of herself, that she was only exchanging the caprice of one mistress for that of another.

Charlie's caprices would take a much more amiable form than Mrs. Maltby's she did not doubt, but the relationship would still be the same, and it might happen at any hour that she would again be thrown upon her own resources.

So she pocketed the money that, after all, was only her rightful due, and was moving towards the door, intending merely to say "Good morning," when Mrs. Maltby, who had expected some protest or some plea for kindness, now said, coldly,—

"You need not trouble any lady to write to me for a recommendation, Miss Heath, because, under

the circumstances, I should not feel justified in giving one."

But even this did not tempt the ill-used girl to retort.

She simply bowed her head and went out of the room, leaving Mrs. Maltby mistress of the situation, but not feeling by any means victorious.

For a few seconds the strange, dark-eyed woman paced the long, narrow room thoughtfully, her head bent forward as though she were studying the pattern of the carpet, though in point of fact she did not see a line of it.

She was more sorry to part with Elise than she cared to admit.

There had been something inexpressibly winning about the beautiful, golden-haired girl who had come into the house like a gleam of sunshine.

In her way she had been very useful. She had never murmured, no matter how much work had been given her to get through; she had been cheerful and obliging, and though she was very young, her manners were so faultless, and there was such an air of good breeding about her, that when guests had been here she had been a great acquisition to the hostess in entertaining them.

And now she was going!—driven away as so many others who had held the same post had been driven away before her; and Mrs. Maltby, as she looked at the unfinished manuscript of her Irish adventures, and glanced at the pile of unopened letters which had come by the morning post, felt it in her heart to be furiously angry with her son for having deprived her of so useful a secretary.

"It's too bad of Clarence," she exclaimed, as she began to realise what she had lost, "much too bad of him, and I won't stand it any longer! He shall go away, he may adopt a profession, or he may marry. I don't care what he does. I can't and I won't put up with this kind of thing! My life is made a burden to me by his conduct; and, now I think of it, I don't consider that I have behaved quite fairly to Miss Heath in putting all the blame upon her. I almost wish—"

What she almost wished was not expressed, for at that moment the study door opened, and Miss Birch, attired as for a journey, walked in, buttoning up her long gloves as she came. Mrs. Maltby had not appeared at the breakfast-table, so Charlie had come to her.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Maltby," said the young lady, coming slowly forward, completing the buttoning process as she spoke. "I'm going home; nice day for a journey, isn't it?"

"Going home!" repeated the lady of the house, contracting her brows as she spoke. "I thought you were going to stay a fortnight!"

"Oh, yes, so did I," returned Charlie, with a yawn, "but I likewise thought I was going to be jolly, and I haven't been. Besides, you might get tired of me and turn me out of the house as you have done Mr. Kingswood and Miss Heath, and I'm afraid I shouldn't like it, so good-bye."

"This is not like you, Charlie—it isn't fair," protested Mrs. Maltby, passionately; "you know that I did not turn Mr. Kingswood out of the house—I never meant to turn Mr. Kingswood out of the house. I never meant him to go; I sent Clarence after him to apologise for me."

"Which he did not do," retorted Charlie, curtly.

"And as for Miss Heath," continued the hostess, not heeding the interruption, "she is not a guest, but a servant—a person whom I employ; and she—"

"Don't say anything against Miss Heath, if you please," here interrupted Charlie, sternly. "I know all the circumstances, and I consider her conduct to be above reproach, in proof of which I am taking her as my friend to live with me."

"Have you considered that in so doing you condemn my son?" asked Mrs. Maltby, steadily.

Charlie shrugged her shoulders; then, looking at the infuriated mother with an inquiring glance, she asked,—

"And what if I do?"

"I hoped that you and Clarence understood

each other, and that you would judge him kindly," was the significant answer.

Charlie laughed heartily, though the colour deepened on her cheek as she said,—

"My dear Mrs. Maltby, you never made a greater mistake in your life, and I think I gave you to understand as much last night. Good-bye, or we shall lose our train."

Then they went through the formality of a hurried leave-taking, and Charlie returned to the Hall, where Elsie was waiting for her.

Our poor little heroine stood by the luggage, conscious that the servants were looking at her, and feeling that they were regarding her with pity, if not with scorn.

She would have been surprised, therefore, if she had heard the verdict in the servants' hall upon her conduct, which was,—

"Good thing for her that she's going. She's too good for this place."

But Charlie came at last. The luggage was got on to the fly, and the two girls drove away, both of them feeling more light-hearted than they had done for many days.

Once or twice, while leaving that house which she never wished to see again, Elsie thought of Mrs. Penfold, and wondered what she would say when she found she was gone.

But the reflection likewise came that she had twice told the old lady that she could not go with her, and it was not her fault if she would not take "no" for an answer.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Maltby had sunk down upon her usual seat between the fire and that thickly-littered round table, which Elsie had never been permitted to clear of the dozens of useless things strewn upon it.

She was very much depressed, and not a little bewildered at the unpleasant novelty of the situation, and she now turned and twisted and dropped and picked up again the half-hoop ring of large diamonds, which it was her custom to play with rather than to wear.

"It's very provoking," she mused, gloomily—"very provoking, indeed; and I don't quite know what to do. I think I must send for Colonel St. Vincent and ask his advice—only I know pretty well what his advice will be, and I don't feel quite equal to making up my mind either way."

The prospect of a second husband was not particularly alluring to Mrs. Maltby, but she had the feeling, common to many women, that she must have a member of the stronger sex belonging to her.

While her son was docile and passively amiable she needed no one else, just as, while her husband lived and seemed rather like a useless upper-servant than the master of the house, she was quite satisfied.

Now, however, if she quarrelled with Clarence she must have some man to take his place at table, and to be the nominal master of the house; but she knew well enough that some men are much more difficult to manage than others, and she was not quite so sure about the tractability of Colonel St. Vincent as she would have liked to be.

She was still undecided when the door again opened, and Mrs. Penfold appeared.

Something in the face of her kinswoman slightly startled Mrs. Maltby, but she repressed her inclination to ask questions, and only remarked, casually,—

"You are going for a drive, I see?"

"Yes, I'm going for a long drive—a very long drive!" was the facetious answer. "I am going to drive to Trebartha, but I shall use steam horses part of the way."

"Going to Trebartha!" echoed Mrs. Maltby, in genuine surprise. "What is the meaning of this? I thought you didn't mean to return there till this winter!"

"I thought I meant to return when I felt disposed to do so," was the snappish answer. "I'm my own mistress, I suppose, and I'm going now, and you can tell your precious son that if ever he hopes to be master of Trebartha he'll follow me soon—be on his best behaviour, and play the part of the repentant

prodigal—it's the only character that will suit him."

"The prodigal!" repeated the anxious mother, angrily. "He has not been getting into debt again, has he? He has not been gambling again, surely? If he has been I'll—"

"You'll marry Colonel St. Vincent," suggested Mrs. Penfold, filling the pause—"though you'll do that in any case, my dear. There's no fool like an old fool when there's a man or a woman in the way. But don't forget to give my message to your son."

"You have not answered my question," persisted Mrs. Maltby. "Has Clarence been getting into debt?"

"I don't know, neither do I care," was the answer. "If you give my message he'll know what I mean. Good-bye."

And without even offering her hand, Mrs. Penfold turned to depart.

Mrs. Maltby could not let her go like this, however, and she followed her into the hall, intending to take leave of her there, and to witness her departure.

But here there was some unaccountable delay. Perce, Mrs. Penfold's servant, came downstairs, and approaching her mistress said something to her in a low tone. Then there was a question addressed to one of the servants, followed after his answer by Mrs. Penfold exclaiming,—

"Gone! Miss Heath gone!"

"Is it Miss Heath for whom you are waiting?" asked Mrs. Maltby, with a provoking smile.

"Of course it is. Where is she? I am going to take her with me to Trebartha," was the half-defiant reply.

"What a pity she didn't know your intention," remarked the mistress of the house, with quiet satire; "for, of course, she would have been delighted, but now she has gone with Miss Birch to Devonshire."

"Gone to Devonshire!" ejaculated the old lady in blank dismay; "are you sure of what you tell me?"

"Certainly not. I am only sure that Miss Birch told me she was going to take her home with her; my interest in that young person is at an end."

"Don't be too sure of that," remarked Mrs. Penfold, in a tone which sounded like a threat; "you have not heard the last of that young lady, not the last by a great deal, my dear. Give me the address of Miss Birch."

"I can't give it to you. It is somewhere near Tiverton; that is all I can tell you," and Mrs. Maltby yawned as she spoke.

But she did not try to mollify her objectionable kinswoman, and she was thankful beyond expression to think she was really going away.

A word at this juncture would detain her, she felt sure, but she took good care not to say that word.

She was getting impatient of the petty worries, that like a number of small thorns pierced her skin, and annoyed her without doing any serious harm, and Mrs. Penfold's presence in the house was the most irritating of all.

So she stood, playing with her diamond ring, with that far-away look in her eyes which might mean so much or so little, while Mrs. Penfold stood irresolute, reluctant to go, now her object in going had vanished, yet not quite knowing at the moment how to say she would stay.

Mrs. Maltby, however, decided that her guest had gone too far to retreat, and turning to the housekeeper who was standing by, she said,—

"I shall go to Hastings myself to-morrow, Kirby, so have everything arranged for me; I want a change."

This observation ended Mrs. Penfold's indecision, and after a very brief leave-taking, she stepped into the hired carriage awaiting her, mentally resolving that this should be her very last visit to Maltby Grange.

Perhaps the mistress of the house registered a similar vow.

Certain it is, that as she afterwards sat brood-

ing in her study, she determined to make a complete and entire change in her life.

Whether the change would be an improvement had yet to be ascertained, but the pleasure of making a change is always great, provided it is done from choice, and not from necessity.

A few hours later, that same day, Clarence Maltby came back to his mother's house, looking not unlike a whipped cur; and he learnt from a servant, whom he questioned, that all the visitors had gone away, and that Colonel St. Vincent was with his mother.

"Has he been here long?" he asked, with a snarl.

"About two hours, sir," was the reply.

He mustered something under his breath, then observed, awkwardly,—

"Did you say that Mrs. Penfold was gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who else?"

"Everyone, sir."

This was not the answer he wanted, but he would not ask if Miss Heath had departed, though he felt pretty sure that she had been included in the "everyone."

In no amiable mood he sought his mother. He had been a little ashamed of himself in the early morning, and had gone off to town before breakfast; but, on reflection, he decided that it was of no use running away—he must brave it out sooner or later, and the sooner the better.

Having come to this practical conclusion he had returned, and now he gloomily resolved that he would put an end to Colonel St. Vincent "sneaking" about the house.

He forgot for the moment that he was not master here.

From his cradle he had been spoilt, and his mother, except on rare occasions, had yielded to his whims, as it is the habit of mothers to yield to an only son.

So now he stuck his hands into his pockets in an aggressive manner, and sauntered into the room where Colonel St. Vincent and his mother were seated on a couch side by side.

The couple were startled, and Mrs. Maltby moved an inch or two from her companion's side, but the Colonel held his ground.

He had won the game, and could now afford to quietly snub the young man whom he had always despised, so he merely nodded his head and said, carelessly,—

"Ah! how d'ye do?"

"I need not ask how you are," retorted the young man, insolently; "you're looking deucedly comfortable there."

"I am very comfortable, thank you," was the unrefined response.

Then, turning to the lady, the Colonel said, in a slightly subdued tone,—

"I may as well tell him, my dear; he is your son, and has a right to hear of the happiness you have conferred upon me."

The lady bowed and drooped her eyelids.

She still played with that diamond ring; and her manner was so exasperating to her son that he could scarcely overcome the impulse to snatch the jewel from her hand and fling it through the window.

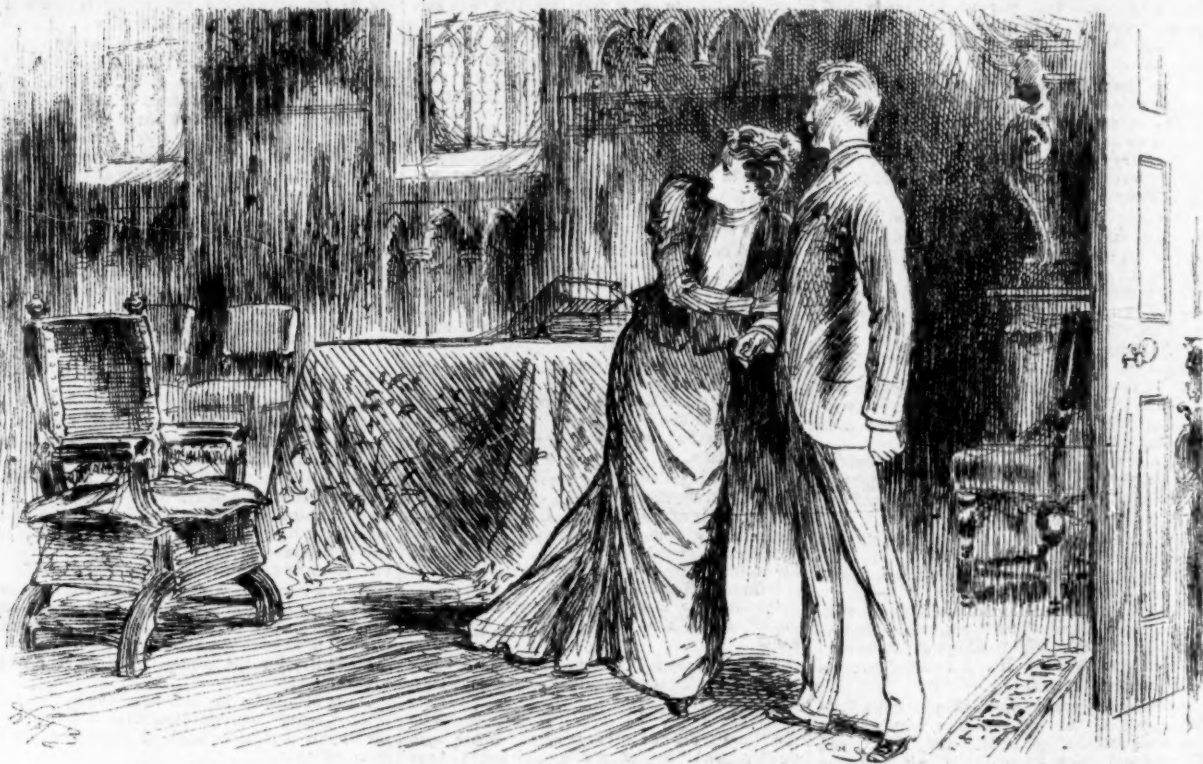
He did not yield to this temptation, however, but his rage against the Colonel seemed to gather in intensity from this self-restraint, and he positively glared at the soldier as the latter rose from his seat on the couch and, taking a step or two towards him, said,—

"My dear boy, your mother has rewarded my devotion by promising to become my wife; and I hope that you will henceforth consider me your trust friend."

Clarence expected something of this kind from the moment that Colonel St. Vincent began to speak, but now rage choked his own utterance.

For a second or two he could not articulate an intelligible word.

But when he did regain the use of his tongue, he poured forth such a torrent of low, vulgar, profane abuse, that his mother stared at him in astonishment, while the sneer and expression of disgust upon the Colonel's face was far more eloquent than words.



"I HAVE HEARD IT BEFORE. I KNOW WHAT IT MEANS. IT IS THE DEATH WATCH!" SAID CLARENCE.—(See page 259).

At length he began to threaten, and even to show signs of fight; for, though he was a coward at heart, he was a young man, whereas Colonel St. Vincent was old, and in any personal encounter the probability was that youth and physical strength must gain an advantage.

Although he was both abused and threatened, Colonel St. Vincent did not lose his temper, neither did he show any sign of fear.

Had he been alone with this young brute he would soon have made short work with him, for he knew that the ruffian was an arrant coward.

But he wished to put him entirely in the wrong, to give him plenty of rope wherewith to hang himself, and to make even the fond, foolish mother take the side of the man who could thus suffer unmerited insults for her sake.

If Clarence Maltby had possessed one atom of common sense, if he had entertained the least consideration for his mother, or respect for himself, he would not have aimed a blow at his future stepfather, a blow which the latter managed to evade, and which, with wonderful self-control, he did not attempt to return.

The climax, however, had been reached, and Mrs. Maltby sprang to her feet, her small, slight figure dilated, her big black eyes blazing, her face aglow with imperious scorn.

"Stop!" she commanded, in a tone which Clarence had never yet in all his life once dared to disobey. "Stop! I am mistress here. Leave my house, and dare not to come back again until you have apologised for this outrage to Colonel St. Vincent and to me."

She looked splendidly handsome as she stood there, like a queen compelling obedience from her most unruly subject, and the Colonel was proud of her.

As for her son, he looked at her sullenly for a few seconds, then, knowing from much experience that resistance was useless, he turned to go.

But when he reached the door he looked back, with an evil expression on his face, and said,—

"You two are not married yet, and, if I can help it, you never will be."

Foolish young man!

But for that vague threat his mother would have been prudent, and would have had the most exacting settlements signed before she went to church; but with this hanging over them, Colonel St. Vincent had little difficulty in persuading her to marry him forthwith, and three days afterwards the wedded pair were on their way to the Continent to spend their honeymoon.

As for Clarence, he had driven Elsie from his mother's house by his conduct towards her; now he was an outcast from himself, uncertain whither to go, or what to do.

"I'll go down to old Pen at Trebartha," he thought, gloomily, when he heard of his mother's marriage; "there's nothing else for me to do. She'll help me if she can."

He came to this resolution as he was walking away from the hotel, whither he had betaken himself on being turned out of the Grange, and he was now rather startled by a lady standing in his path and asking,—

"Pardon me, but am I speaking to Mr. Maltby, of Maltby Grange?"

"My name is Maltby," he replied, in a tone of annoyance, at being accosted by a stranger, particularly as the questioner was not young, and her beauty was a thing of the past.

"I thought so. There was a girl whom your mother engaged as a secretary; a girl with dark eyes and light hair. Can you tell me what has become of her?"

"You mean Miss Heath, I suppose!" he said, curtly.

"Oh, is that the name she goes under?" asked Edith Grey, with a sneer.

"Goes under! What! Isn't it her real name?" asked the young man, with suddenly awakened interest.

"She has no name," was the disdainful reply.

"I must know more about this. Come this way," he said, eagerly, and turned into the park, whither Edith Grey followed him.

(To be continued.)

ELECTRICITY is coming into very general use in Poland. It is being largely adopted in many factories, superseding rope and belt driving. Electric lighting of factories is also becoming general. Most of the important railway-stations are lighted with electricity.

A PROCESS has been invented and patented in Brazil for preparing coffee in tabloids by a system of compression. It is argued that not only will there be less expense in exporting coffee in this form, but that the customer will be more certain of thus receiving for his use the pure, unadulterated article.

IN CHINA the old-fashioned system of private letter-carrying still prevails. Letter-shops are to be found in every town. If he has a letter to send, the Chinaman goes to a letter-shop and bargains with the keeper thereof. He pays two-thirds of the cost, leaving the receiver to pay the rest on delivery.

THE famous Blue Grotto of Capri has now a rival in the State of Minnesota. It occurs in a lake, on the shore of which is a cavern of white limestone flooded with water. A swimmer enters the cave, and, turning to look outward, sees the most beautiful shades of green and blue in the water, and a silvery sheen over his submerged limbs.

THE HOLLANDERS are, perhaps, of all the northern people those who smoke the most, the humidity of their climate making it almost a necessity, while the moderate cost of tobacco with them renders it accessible to all. To show how deeply rooted is the habit, it is enough to say that the boatmen of Holland measure distances by smoking.



ROSE WAS RUNNING ACROSS THE LAWN AS FAST AS SHE COULD IN HER RIDING HABIT.

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WON'T SHE BE A COUNTESS!

SIBEL felt utterly crushed and miserable as she walked slowly down the starlit path on Hugh Macdonald's arm. Knowing that he was aware of her engagement to Lushington, she had not disturbed herself about his evident attachment, taking it for granted that it would never go beyond a boyish predilection. Rose's visit seemed to her particularly opportune, for she was so pretty and charming that she would be sure to win his heart; and though she felt a natural but inexcusable pang of jealousy at the thought, she had made up her mind, as Phil would say, to be an ardent godmother to the match. Now he had spoken and spoilt everything, and she, who was so intensely fond of him, had been obliged to wound him desperately on this night of all others! They were drawing near to the brilliantly lighted window, when her fingers gently pressed his arm.

"You won't let it make any difference!" with a wistful glance.

"Not to you, I shall always be the same." Then he pulled aside the curtain for her to pass through. Phil immediately stepped forward, and claimed her; whilst Hugh went back into the darkness, determined not to face the light till he had struggled with his sorrow, and conquered it.

"Hallo! what's the matter?" exclaimed Forrester, as he caught sight of something that looked suspiciously like a tear on the thick brown lashes.

"Hush! Come on to the terrace with me for a few minutes."

"It's the only gallop down on the list, and we mustn't lose it."

"Then go and get another partner."

Struck by the sadness of her tone he was

conscious of his own selfishness, and, giving her his arm, walked her up to the end of the terrace without a word. There were not many people about, for the supper-room had just been opened, and private conversation was possible without unwished-for auditors. Leaning against the ivied balustrade, he looked at his cousin with vivid curiosity. Certainly something had upset her; but what on earth could it be? Who was she dancing with last? Hugh! He had seen them slip out of the window, and wondered why they should go out in the middle of the waltz instead of waiting till it was over.

They weren't likely to quarrel, for he had only remarked to Rose that evening that Macdonald was a "gone con," and would give anything to step into Lushington's shoes.

"You might tell me, I think," he ventured after a long pause, during which he had seen her apply her handkerchief furtively to her eyes.

"Tell you what!"

"Oh, come now, no humbug. You are not the sort of girl to cry for nothing."

"Crying! What put that into your head?"

"Oh, just as you like," humbly. "Only as I am your cousin, and the only male relation you have about here, I had a right to ask. What has Hugh been doing to you?" curiosity prevailing over pride. "He can't have been rude!"

"I should think not," indignantly. "Hugh is the dearest boy I ever knew."

"Humph! better tell him so then," rather sulkily; "but look here, Sibel, if you are in a mess, for goodness sake tell me, and I'll help you out. You know I always did."

Sibel smiled, for, according to her own remembrance, he seemed more likely to help her "in."

"I'm not in a mess, thanks!"

"But if you are tired of Lushington, I think, between us all, we could get you off. I used to stick up for him through thick and thin, but by Jove, that last bit of business stuck in my throat. No wonder he thought better to hook it."

"What do you mean?" looking up at him with scared eyes.

"Don't you know? Oh, hang it all! I—I—quite forgot," suddenly remembering that he had sworn not to tell her. "It was nothing—some other man. Come, or we shall miss all the galop," and he tried to hurry her away.

"I won't stir till you've told me," she said, resolutely determined to know, though terribly afraid what the revelation might be.

"Then you'll have to stay here all night," sitting down on the top of the balustrade, and swinging his long legs.

"Phil, you must tell me."

"Dashed if I will."

"Then I won't speak to you for the rest of the evening," turning away and walking slowly towards the house.

He was after her in an instant. "Now this is what I call a thundering shame! Do you want me to perjure myself?"

"No!"—like a true woman she added, "but I want to know."

"All right, the sin's on your head—not mine. A certain Mr. Springfield, origin unknown, gave Lushington a thrashing—a regular thrashing, and no mistake about it—on the steps of his club."

She stopped still, her chest heaving. "And what then?"

"He cleared out."

A sickening sense of shame crept over her, and she moved forward, feeling as if she must sink into the ground. Phil, rather aghast at the impression he had made, drew her hand within his arm, and led her towards the window.

"You know there was nothing for him to do. You can't call a man out in these days—you can only take out a summons against him, and bind him over to keep the peace; but what's the good of that? No satisfaction, you know—except to an old woman."

"I would have done something," she said, between her set teeth; and she walked into the ball-room, with her head in the air, and her cheeks as pale as death.

The gallop was over, and numbers of tired dancers streamed out into the garden, anxious to have a breath of fresh air.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," said Lord Windsor, in an aggrieved tone, "but nowhere could I find you. Come in to supper," offering his arm. "You look as if you wanted it."

Poll was left to his own devices, whilst the Earl carried off his prize, whom he thought fit to lodge in the quietest corner of the long dining-room, with a little table in front, and his own broad back to cut her off from the rest of the world. He attended to her wants with assiduous care, and pressed her to drink a great deal of champagne in order to bring some colour into her cheeks. He watched her anxiously, till she looked a little brighter, much exercised in her mind as to what had troubled her.

"Something to do with that brute Lushington," he thought to himself, "but I've a card to play against him, which is certain to dish him, if he gets too troublesome."

"Remember last time I came to the Chestnuts!" he asked, presently, as he placed some vanilla cream on her plate.

"Yes, weren't you a little cross?" trying to seem cheerful.

"Not a little—I was in a towering passion, a regular fury, capable of anything. Your fault, you know. Why wouldn't you take my rose?"

"I suppose there was a reason, but you can't expect me to remember it."

"Then it isn't there now," taking the gardenia out of his buttonhole.

"I never said it wasn't," colouring slightly. "But if you don't remember it, it can't be. You will wear this to-night?" looking at her very earnestly.

"I would rather not."

"But why?"

"I think you have heard that I'm engaged to—"

"—to—" blushing vividly. "Yes, yes, I know. But there's nothing in it—I mean it will never come off."

"Lord Windsor!" with wide-open eyes. "Yes, it couldn't; it would be monstrous. Somebody will have to stop it!"

Had he heard of that disgraceful scene in St. James's Street? Her eyes fell, and she forgot to contradict him. Encouraged by her silence, he cast a cautious look round and leant forward, with a sudden eagerness in his face.

"May I speak to Lord Wentworth to-morrow? I believe he is your guardian."

"Speak to him! What about?" in bewilderment.

"You! What else could I want with him? What else am I ever thinking of night and day? Miss Fitzgerald," his voice growing husky, "I know I'm premature, but I can't wait any longer—I should go mad if I did. When it is broken off, when you are free, will you have me? I'm not good enough—"

"Stop, please," in great distress. "This is very wrong—I've no right to listen."

"Yes, you have. You are free now; you will never be Lushington's wife, so why shouldn't you be mine?"

She got up from her chair, gathering up her gloves, fan, and handkerchief in a great hurry.

"Take me back!"

"But you haven't answered me," standing straight in front of her.

"No answer is needed," drawing herself up with quiet dignity. "It is an insult to ask me."

His face fell.

"Jove! I didn't know that you would take it like that. Just tell me one thing, and I'll never bother you again."

For once in his life he looked so thoroughly in earnest that she was moved to pity.

"If Lushington had never existed, would you?" the perspiration stood on his forehead, and his lip trembled under his long moustaches—"would you have had me now?"

Intensely sorry to grieve him, she gently shook her head.

"And you never will?" in surprised dismay. "No," in a tremulous whisper.

"I don't think you can understand. There's

nothing against me, and I'd do my very best to make you happy."

"I don't doubt it. Let us be friends, please, but nothing more."

"Nothing more—just yet," drawing her hand through his arm, and beginning to recover from the shock.

"Nothing more for ever," with grave decision.

"You mean it," looking down into her face. Seeing no sign of hesitation there he muttered, "Good heaven!" under his breath.

Then he picked up the gardenia from the table, and held it out to her without a word. She took it from him silently, and fastened it on her left shoulder.

"She's the sweetest thing on earth," he thought, with a huge sigh, as she sat down by Lord Wentworth's side in the drawing-room; "and what is to become of me without her, goodness knows!"

"And where is Hugh?" asked Lord Wentworth, with a smile.

"I don't know," with a sudden trouble in her face. "I left him in the garden."

"You went out with him, and came back without him. I understand, the poor boy!"

"I couldn't help it—indeed I couldn't," feeling horribly guilty and ashamed.

"No, my dear, you are not to blame; but happiness does not seem to go with the name of Macdonald. And yet he's one in a thousand."

"And I love him so much!"

"But not enough. Hugh must have the whole or nothing."

"And I am sure if I were a girl he would not have to ask me twice," said Lady Windsor, who had overheard the remark. "He quite fascinates me. I hope everyone has been kind to him, so as to make this night a happy one."

"It will be one that he will never forget," said Lord Wentworth, with a double meaning that she would not understand.

"You are tired, I see it in your face," said the Countess, anxiously. "Won't you go home and send the carriage back?"

"Desert my post? No, that would never do; but if there is a quiet corner in which I could rest without being in anyone's way!" with a sigh of utter weariness.

"Come into the library," and lie down; you will be quite alone."

The prospect was so tempting that he could not refuse it, though he looked back with some compunction at Sibyl.

"My dear, I don't like to leave you."

"I see my partner coming. May I wake you when the carriage is at the door?"

"If it is not troubling you," and he turned away, with his hostess on his arm.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"LUSHINGTON BE HANGED!"

AND where was Hugh? All alone, battling with his sorrow, as a brave man will, whilst the weak lie down and are crushed by its weight.

"I might have known it," he thought, in wild regret. "As if anything could go right in this cursed place. It was here that my mother knew her misery; it was right that the curse should follow her son. But what is to come after? There is nothing left to live for—nothing in all the wide world. Nothing would have been too hard for me, nothing too difficult, with the hope of winning her to lead me on; but now—"

Oh, the horror of loneliness that came over his empty heart, as he thought of the long years lying before him! The man who had been to him father and mother could not linger much longer on this side of the grave, and when he was gone he (Hugh Macdonald) would be alone—quite alone—without a single being to whom he could think himself necessary.

It never occurred to him that if one girl refused him, there were plenty of others who would only be too glad to accept him. His love for Sibyl had been the one engrossing passion of a faithful heart, and the idea of changing from her

and fixing his hopes on some other had never entered his head as a possibility.

He paced up and down by the side of the lake, telling himself that he must be strong. A man's courage could never be known until it was tried, and if it failed when the test was given then the man was a coward, and was worthy of contempt, not pity.

Sibyl, lovely, good and pure as she was, could he grudge her to Dudley Wentworth? He was the noblest man he knew, and surely they were well fitted for each other. If Dudley loved her, as he must have done, or she never would have given her love unasked, could he have borne to step into his place, to cheat him when he was not there to see, to steal away his bride behind his back? No—a thousand times no.

He had met with nothing but kindness from his hand, and he would give him back the same under any circumstances, however trying. Yes, after all, there was something for him to do, looking down at a star which was reflected so clearly on the bosom of the water that it seemed to have dropped from its place in the sky. He could watch over her as a friend—instead of a lover, with no selfish thought in his breast, and no hope but to guard her for Dudley, and against the dissolute wretch who was not fit to come near her.

And then, when Dudley came back, he would thank him for the service he had done, and value his happiness none the less, because the boy whom he had always loved had had a hand in it. For an hour or more he wandered about in the starlight, inclined to wonder why Heaven had ever created him; but as time went on his spirits grew calmer, and he began to see that selfish happiness was not the highest aim of life; but that a truer, better happiness might be found in the loss of your own, whilst you endeavored to win it for others. That should be his object for the future.

He would hide his secret torture within his own breast, teach himself to laugh and smile, even if his heart broke in the effort, go back to Sibyl now with a cheerful face, as if nothing had happened, and ask her for that last dance which she had promised—how long ago was it? It seemed as if years had passed between now and then!

It would grieve her kind little heart to think she had given him a lifelong grief. Hadn't she cried, absolutely cried, because she was so sorry to pain him? Oh, never again would he make her tears to flow; he would try to be the joy of her life, and not the sorrow; support her if grief should come on its leaden wing, and in the hour of deepest darkness whisper a word of hope. He walked up the dewy gardens with a firm tread, and head held high, and such an expression in his beautiful eyes as a soldier might wear who was leading a forlorn hope, certain of death, but equally sure of a deathless glory!

He came face to face with Rose in the centre window, and she looked up at him with an unconscious reproach in her wistful eyes. Sibyl had wished him to dance with her, and he had forgotten!

"Is this the last?"

"No, there is one more. Lady Windsor has insisted upon our staying for that," she answered very gravely, for her heart was sore at his neglect.

"Will you give it to me? I know I'm very behindhand, but I've been out of doors with a headache." He put his arm round her waist, and she never said she had a partner, whom she saw coming towards her at the end of a long vista through the suite of rooms. Not for any man under the sun would she have given up this one chance of a dance with Hugh. She had been waiting for it all the evening, and it had come at last! Her pride was saved by the mention of a headache, and her heart was swelling with happiness, as she glided round the room, within the protection of his arms.

"That is well," thought Sibyl, as her eyes fell on the pair. "After all, it was ridiculous to think he would make himself miserable about me. And good may come out of evil." She was dancing at the time with Major Edfield,

who was still of the opinion that Lushington was a lucky fellow, and did not object to trying his own luck during his absence. But Miss Fitzgerald was not half so agreeable as she was two years ago, and the more he said the less she seemed to listen. Was she thinking of Windsor's lanky figure, as he lounged against the wall, in a temporary fit of the blues? and was there any connection between her absence of mind and his sudden attack of the dumps? These questions harassed his mind so much that directly he was free he went after the Earl, and asked if there were any news of Lushington—meaning to lead the conversation round to his, the Major's, engagement.

"Lushington be hanged," said Windsor, roughly; "come and have a liquor up," leading his friend into the supper-room.

"Just tell me, between ourselves, if the engagement is still going on," persisted the Major, who was too deeply interested to take a hint.

"Oh, curse it all, haven't you anything else to talk about?" and the Earl ground his teeth.

"If you object to the topic I'll change it."

"Dead no—don't object—only it's infernally stale."

"You see I've been away."

"And so have I—wish I had stayed where I was," gloomily pulling at his moustaches. "Country's rot at this time of year, and the Court's the rottenest hole in England."

"My dear old chappie, take a blue pill. You are evidently out of sorts," laughed Belfield, who saw that a screw was loose, and didn't mind it a bit.

"Blue pill!" with a glance of ineffable contempt, as he tossed off a glass of champagne. "I'd swallow a whole boxful never to have stirred from London."

"Why, what have you been up to?" eying him with evident curiosity.

"Nothing, only a fellow with a thundering foot trod on my great toe."

"And that's why you're lounging for town! Ha—ha!"

"Well, why not? Don't do anything but lean against walls, and block up doorways, down there. No fatigue and no nonsense."

"I hate those London crushes. Give me a partner like Miss Fitzgerald, and a room like yours, and I'll stay up to any hour of the morning."

"And be precious sorry when it is over!"

Captain Everard laid a hand upon his arm.

"Come along, old fellow. It's the last dance, and there are not more than half a dozen couples in the room."

"Five too many; I won't add to them," and sitting down in a chair, he let his two friends go off without him, whilst he rested his elbows on a little table, and his head on his hands.

"What's up?" asked Everard, inquiringly.

"Come too far, and dished his own game, that's about it. Strange that she wouldn't be a Countess."

"Who? I don't understand!"

"A baby would know. But if you're going to try your chance, I tell you she's booked."

"Yes, that old affair—Harold Lushington."

"Not Lushington but—look at them now!"

As he spoke, Sibel passed them, slowly and gracefully going round the long room, with Hugh's arm once more round her waist, and her face as pale as his.

No one knew what a struggle it had been to master his feelings sufficiently to claim her, but it had been done for her sake, and in the peaceful smile that came to her lips he had his reward. Lady Windsor watched them with a curious feeling in her heart, as she wondered what it was that had taken the buoyancy from each.

There was something in MacDonald's expression which reminded her of his father's when he heard how his friend had wronged him; the same bitter pain kept down by his pride, the same look of endurance, which told her that the sorrow, whatever it was, would last to the end. She sighed heavily. In the midst of the merriment and gaiety there was an undercurrent of trouble, like the minor chord in a triumphal march, and

it seemed as if she were alone were aware of it, as the rest passed smilingly.

As soon as the dance was over, Lord Wentworth was woke up, and all gathered round the Countess with polite speeches of farewell.

Hugh was the last, and in his usual winning fashion he gave a peculiar grace to his thanks. She looked up into his face with wistful affection. "I could almost ask for a kiss," she said, with a blush on her faded cheek.

The colour rushed into the boy's face. He stooped and touched her cheek, then her hand with his dark moustaches. "Your kindness is too great," he murmured hurriedly, with sudden tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"I THOUGHT HE WAS KILLED!"

THE morning after the dance the young people had agreed amongst themselves that breakfast and luncheon should be put into one at twelve o'clock.

Hugh was alone in the room when Sibel appeared with last night's bouquet and two or three letters in her hand. Rather taken aback to see Hugh and no one else, she dropped a letter as she hastily shifted the bouquet in order to shake hands with him. He stooped to pick it up, and saw at once that it was from Major Lushington.

"He talks of coming home in six months' time," she said, nervously, "and—and he seems so glad."

"I suppose he can't make up his mind to stay away any longer," very gravely, as he pulled out her chair to a convenient distance from the table.

"No; but somebody told me that regiments generally stayed in Canada for five or six years."

"Yes; but, you see, troops are being moved from every direction. There is no knowing how many we may need in the East."

"Is there any news?" with a startled glance.

"Yes; it looks rather bad," handing her the *Morning Post*.

She read the telegrams, and every scrap of colour forsook her face—a sign which Hugh noticed as a confirmation of his suspicions.

"Does Lord Wentworth know?"

"I have been with him for the last two hours."

"Oh, Hugh, how good of you, when I was fast asleep in bed!"

"You know nothing about it. I heard something of it from Everard last night; but we agreed we'd hold our tongues."

"You should have told me!"

"I did not wish to spoil your evening. It would have done no good. I told them to bring me the papers as soon as they came, and when I saw what was in them I got up at once."

"And how is Lord Wentworth?"

"Not much. He was terribly done up to begin with, and then all this came atop of it," he ended with a shrug.

"Do you remember, it was just the same last time that we went to a dance at the Court? The bad news came the next day."

"Only this has been expected—it was not a sudden blow like the other. However, with Roberts out there, I suppose we shall pull through; and the harder she fighting the more Dudley will like it."

"Of course he will like it. It never is half so bad for those who are gone as for those who stay behind," as she tried to hand him a cup of coffee, but put it down for fear lest he should see how her hand had shaken.

He came over and fetched it, then went back to the other end of the table instead of taking a seat near her, as he would naturally have done.

"I wonder if they would take volunteers," he said, after a thoughtful pause. "I know sometimes, when they are short of men, they are glad of anybody. Uncle always says I am a fair shot, so I might be of use, though I've never worn a uniform."

"What do you mean?" in breathless anxiety.

"I mean that I should like to do something—

something better than idling my life away. This sort of thing can't go on for ever. Nobody wants me here—my uncle has you to take care of him, and you—you—"

"Have no one but you to trust to if Lord Wentworth is ill," she said tremulously, feeling that after last night she had lost all claim upon him, and yet she could not do without him and let him go.

One swift glance he shot at her downcast face, and pressed his lips together.

"There are the Forresters."

"Yes; but what are they? Phil so weak that he would break if you leant on him—the General so narrow-minded and prejudiced that I would rather die than ask his advice."

"But your brother—is he never coming home?"

"Oh, yes. Gay will come when everything is too late. I am the loneliest being on earth, and I haven't a single relation to care for me!"

Did she know how she was trying him—almost more than mortal could bear! To go to India, to fight side by side with the man he loved best, and then to die—to die, if possible—and leaving nothing but a gentle regret behind in the hearts that could do so well without him. This was the one hope that supported him, and it seemed too hard to be asked to give it up; and yet if she asked it was there anything that he could refuse? He had devoted himself to her service, and if she said stay, stay he must.

He got up from his chair, breakfast seemed to be too ridiculous a thing to concern himself about at that moment, and went towards her.

"Do you really want me?" in a low voice.

"Want you? Yes; I always do, and I always shall. Oh, Hugh, don't leave me!" stretching out her hands to him, and looking beseechingly into his face as if she were blind to the pain she saw there and only conscious of her own.

He passed his hand over his forehead, and paused as if to steady his quickened pulses, then took hers in his, holding them gently and reverently, as if he had scarcely the right to touch them now.

"You needn't ask me twice—I am yours, do with me what you like."

"You are the kindest, truest friend that girl ever had. Oh, what can I ever do to repay you?"

"How ill you look! As if you had not slept a wink all night. You are not well—what is it?"—seized with a sudden fear.

"Nothing—only a pain in my heart. I've had it two or three times in my life before, and it was rather sharp last night. I always have a cold volatile in my room, but the bottle was empty."

"Why didn't you send to me? I will get you mine after breakfast. But, Hugh," trouble and anxiety in her beautiful eyes, "isn't it very dangerous? What brings it?"

"Lots of things, too much exertion, or a sudden shock."

"Was it the dancing?"

"The dancing or something else," he answered evasively.

"And you were actually thinking of going to the war? The rough life, and the forced marches would have killed you, without anything else!"

"A man must die somehow," as he went back slowly to his chair.

"An unpleasant necessity, but one needn't be talking of it," and Phil came in, followed by his sister. "Were you two concocting a murder, and wondering how to get the man best out of the way?"

"Yes," said Sibel cheerfully; "but don't let it out. Sit down and eat your breakfast. Which will you have, coffee or wine? You know this is luncheon as well as dinner!"

"Then I vote for claret, as a happy medium, less compromising than a B. and S."

"You horrid boy!" exclaimed Rose; "who would have thought of such a thing!"

"You are not up to half the wickedness of these wild army-men," said Hugh chaffingly.

"Do you imagine they ever stoop to so innocent a thing as tea?"

"I think they do, for Phil's friend, Mrs. Cannoble, was asked to tea at the barracks!"

"Had you there," laughed Phil. "Sibel, it was a great pity you weren't at Bramble's Peak yesterday. Hugh's speech was splendid, a regular stunner, and the people cheered him till I thought the drum of my ear was gone. There was one old woman, with a mother gamp in her hand, and a red hood on her head; she came and bobbed before him like a dandling dervish; and, what did she say, Hugh?"

"Only nonsense," flushing slightly, "not worth repeating."

"Do tell me!" and Sibel leant forward eagerly.

"I can't remember," and Phil contracted his narrow forehead in the effort of taxing his memory. "Dash it! I've quite forgotten. Something about his being the image of his pa—the same 'hangel face' with the good heart looking out of his eyes. I think Hugh gave her half-a-sovereign on the strength of it!"

"Nothing of the sort!" and then anxious to change the subject, he asked if Sibel had any plans for the day.

"I only thought that as the Forresters have never seen the view from our favourite hill, you might take them there this afternoon."

"But how are we to get there?"

"Phil could have the cab—and Rose May-Queen."

"And you?"

"I shall stay with Lord Wentworth."

Of course there were vehement protestations, and everyone in turn offered to stay at home; but Sibel was firm, and at last induced them to believe that she would be thankful to be rid of them. She went upstairs, Lord Wentworth's private suite of rooms no longer being forbidden ground, and found that he was suffering from a splitting headache.

Her absence was more desirable than her presence; so after placing a handkerchief soaked with eau de cologne on his forehead, she stole out of the room, and thought she would go into the garden. But, first of all, she must see what damage had been done to her dress, and tell Manner that they would have five-o'clock tea on the lawn. When everything had been arranged, she established herself in a comfortable chair, under the shade of a willow, whose branches supported on stakes formed a natural arbour over her head, and were not allowed to screen her from the outer world.

The buzzing of the bees was very soothing, and soon her heavy eyes closed, and she was fast asleep. She woke, with a start, to find that the tea table was already in its place. Pulling out her watch, she was much surprised to find it was already half-past five, and the others had not returned; but just as she was wondering at their being so late, there was the sound of horses' hoofs on the gravel. She rose from her seat, and went to meet them, but before she could reach the door, Rose was off her horse, and running across the lawn as fast as she could in her habit.

"Oh, Sibel!" she cried as she flung her arms round her neck, and burst into tears. "I thought he was killed!"

"Who?" with a pang of fear.

"Hugh—he fell!" Putting her on one side, Sibel sprang forward. There was Hugh, thank Heaven! leaning against the door-post, but his face was like death.

(To be continued.)

We have had an opportunity of examining the current number of *The Troubadour*, a bright little journal issued monthly and dedicated to all lovers of music—but more particularly to those who practise or are interested in the banjo, mandoline, violin and guitar. The aim of the proprietors of this periodical is to make each succeeding issue better than the last; to constantly widen its scope, and always to give something fresh in the way of practical information to its readers. *The Troubadour* is published by Messrs. Barnes and Mullins, of Burnmouth.

A TARDY CONFESSION.

—30—

(Continued from page 247.)

CHAPTER IX.

THE MURDER.

TREMBLING in every limb, Florence arose from the chair she had occupied, her face scarce less white than that of her unwelcome visitor.

"How dare you!" she said. "It was all that she could utter; as, with fear she could not hide depleted on her every feature, she saw him advance to where she stood."

"Don't be afraid," he answered, lifting one hot, burning hand to brush the hair from his no less burning forehead. "I am not going to hurt you, Florence. I am here to bid you good-bye for ever. Don't speak," he added, seeing her lips move. "I know all, maybe it is justice; but if I have sinned I have been sorely punished; more so, I fancy, though I may be wrong, than I think my sin deserved. But it is ended now, dear! I am going away, never again to come between you and your happiness. I asked Edward to take care of you; he has done so," and a bitter laugh broke from him, and then his tone changed once more; the wild look passed from his eyes, which became moist with unshed tears, whilst a dry choking sob he could not subdue broke from his bosom, and then he stretched out his arms to the woman before him; and before she could resist she was enfolded in his strong embrace. She felt his arms like bands of iron press around her, his hot breath play on her forehead as he told her how he loved her, and then he released her, when he rushed from the room.

A few moments later Laura entered, but Mrs. Marston had recovered her self-possession. She was standing by the window, watching until she lost him in the distance, and then she turned to see if the former was aware that anyone had left the house.

"Have you been home long?" she asked.

"Some time, Florence. But who was that man who just now left? Was it Egbert?"

"Yes, he came to say good-bye," was the reply. "He has promised never to darken my path again," and Laura could not fail to see the relief which his promise had given to her cousin's wife.

"Gone!" she repeated to herself, a short time after, when alone she wondered what it was that had passed between them, her own heart breaking the while, for he had gone, left her without one thought.

The days were visibly lengthening now, and tea had long been removed before the curtains were closed for the evening.

Laura had for her little cousin's amusement sung one or two songs, and then the piano was closed, Mrs. Marston anxiously awaiting the sound of her husband's return, every now and then looking at the timepiece, as the minutes passed on—on, and he did not come.

"How late papa is!" she said, turning to the child, and then she moved to the window, but all was quiet as the grave. There was little traffic in Fulham-place, and the one street-lamp visible looked dim and miserable in the damp night air, and still he did not come.

An hour behind, and Laura, equally anxious, left the room, proceeding down the gravel path leading to the outer gate, to see if she could discern him in the distance, a feeling of dread hanging, clinging around her, which try as she would she could not dispel, and Florence anxiously questioning her when she again entered within.

But still the weary hours dragged on, and no Edward. A messenger was sent to the office, where all was silent as the grave, but to return with the same result—no sign of the missing man.

And thus the long night wore on, and still the two women watched, little Ada alone having succumbed to the sleep which closed her weary eyes, and the bitter cold of the early dawn benumbing their stiffened limbs.

"Lie down for awhile, Florrie, dear," the girl

said, "and I will awaken you the moment any news arrives;" but in her agony too great for words, the other gently moved her from her, until Laura, as she gazed on her white, wild face, almost feared that her reason would give way.

And the moments still dragged on, each one bringing the glorious day more near, the cold grey passing away, and a clear blue sky with fleecy clouds almost as those of summer alone coming across the January sun, whilst two white faces yet peered against the window panes, from which the frost was quickly disappearing.

A few hours later, and a policeman with a doctor was seen to enter the offices of Marston and Co., Engineers, and then an anxious crowd pressed forward until with difficulty they were kept from pushing their way up the steps to the room where a man lay with his face to the floor, and still those women watched—watched on.

But no cry escaped the lips of the widowed wife, when at last the sad truth was broken to her so gently, fearing for the consequences which might ensue; but her dumb grief depleted in the agony of her velvet eyes was terrible to behold, as refusing all food she lay with those eyes ever open, restlessly moving beneath the heavy lids, and an old faded photo—it was his—pressed to her bosom.

But at length the fountain of her grief gave way, and the doctors said she was saved. It was then she for the first time spoke of her great trouble, and when she drew Laura's head down close to hers, the one thought she feared passed through their minds; but the only word she uttered was Egbert!

CHAPTER X.

TEN YEARS AFTER.

No clue was discovered to the murderer, and, like many other similar crimes, the hand which struck Edward Marston his death blow was never discovered, thus adding yet another to the many mysteries existing in the great metropolis.

Egbert had as completely gone as though he had indeed been laid in his grave, Mrs. Marston and Laura alone retaining the knowledge they possessed, which if given in evidence would have led most likely to his arrest, notwithstanding that, in their own minds, their suspicions rested on him alone; but then the safe having been broken into and emptied of its contents, and, according to the policeman's testimony, the thief evidently having been suddenly discovered in the act, and in self-defence felling the other to the ground, was not in accordance with what would have been likely to have taken place, had the brothers met, when, doubtless, words would have passed between them, and the sound of an altercation been heard by others, which was not the case.

Florence weakened far too much by the effects of her terrible grief to transact any business, Laura acted on her behalf, the furniture disposed of according to her wish, as soon as the arrangements following on the dead man's funeral could be effected; and then with Ada, whose pretty face was very sad and worn, these two women so strangely brought together, bid adieu to the scenes wrought with such misery to each, determining to make their home in a seaport town on the borders of Flanders; and here they settled, an old French woman who had once been nurse to Mrs. Marston acting as their attendant.

Ada was delighted with the quaint customs of the old Flemish town, a century behind ourselves, and the short petticoats and high caps of the women as they sat vending their wares in the broad market-place, knitting the while in the warm sunshine, a basin of *soupe maigre* their only luxury.

It was the hot season, when Paris was unbearable, and there were many families, both English and French, flocking into the little town, the Hotel des Bains close by the sea having long been filled, and on the wide expanse of sand, when the tide was low, the tourists would swarm to enjoy the fresh breeze coming from the ocean.

"There comes a new family come in this afternoon, madame," old Marguerite said one morning, when placing some lovely fruit and cream on the breakfast-table: "an English lady with her son, but he is an inveterate, poor young man, and old Jacques has to draw him in his chair each day to do so. Look, Mademoiselle, quick! dare he goes!" and Marguerite drew Laura's attention to where a gentleman was, as she said, being conveyed by Jacques along the rough, stony streets to the smoother road leading to the sands.

By his side an elderly lady was walking, who every now and then made some alteration in the arrangement of his pillows, so as to give greater comfort to the invalid. They passed close by the windows where they were standing; and owing to some remark made by the former the man raised his head, evidently attracted by the fair English face of Ada, but he had no sooner done so than his eyes widened in astonishment as they fell on that of her cousin.

Ten years was a long time, but with Laura they had wrought but little change, whilst her features were engraved on the memory of Bertram Ormonde as faithfully as though they had parted but yesterday.

Another moment the bath-chair was stopped, and Lady Leach was shaking hands with Laura, the while she was horribly abusing herself for the heartless way in which she had treated her companion in the days gone by.

"But I was well punished, dear," she added. "After dismissing you I had a string of the most awful, designing young women imaginable, those who could not please me endeavouring to run away with Bertie, and he making love to each in their turn in the most provoking way."

"But I am so sorry to see Mr. Ormonde an invalid," Laura said, when she was able to get a word in. "Nothing serious, I hope?"

"A fall, my dear," her ladyship replied, "injured his spine, poor fellow!" and then declaring for the fiftieth time that she dare not keep him waiting any longer, she returned to the chair, kissing her hand to Laura, and bowing pleasantly to Florence and Ada.

For some days after the chair was not seen, and on Jacques being interviewed by Marguerite, the gentleman, he said, was too ill to leave the house, and that evening a note was delivered to Laura from her ladyship, imploring her to come to the Hotel de Flandres, Bertie she feared was dying.

"It was his wish, dear," the little woman said, "there is something, he says, he must say to you, for he is so much worse, and he could not go with this secret untold. I hope it is nothing very dreadful, but you had better humour him."

And so Laura was led to Bertie's bedside, and as she looked on his altered features, so aged as they now appeared, she almost wondered how she could have recognised him a short week ago.

"I am very ill, Laura," he said, holding out to her a thin and wasted hand, "and somehow I don't think I shall live."

"You must not think so," she answered; "you will be better in a few days."

"I may be," he replied, fixing his eyes on her face. "How little altered you are, your hair as beautiful as ever," passing his hand over it, "and I am an old man; but I can't bear it any longer, so am going to make a clean breast of it," he went on, referring to the former subject.

"You remember when we last met. You were coming out of the Park with Egbert Marston, and I cut you. Hush!" and he lifted his hand as she would have spoken, "I hated that man, because I had wronged him, and I loved you. He did not recognise me, but I knew him in a moment; he was the confidential clerk of my uncle, whom he was supposed to have robbed, and for which crime he suffered penal servitude, whilst I, Bertrand Ormonde, was the real thief. There, it is all out now. Tell me you hate me!"

"I can't say that," she answered; "though it is hard to forgive you."

He was waiting patiently for her answer,

and when it came his voice became as gentle as a woman's.

"You will try, dear?" he said. "I was a wild, wicked youth then, but the most I could do I have done to make amends. The night Edward Marston was murdered I met Egbert. He had just come from his office, but don't start—he was not his brother's murderer. The man who committed the crime was an old servant of my own; the only one who knew that it was I who robbed my uncle. Plunder was his object, and I detected him but an hour afterwards with the stolen property in his possession, but where or how he obtained it I did not know until the reports in the papers enlightened me. To have given evidence against him, after having given information to the police, would only have been to bring a hornet's nest about my own ears, and so I determined to let matters take their course."

"And Egbert?" Laura asked.

"I am coming to that," he said. "Feeling sure that had others seen him as I had, as was probable they might have done, that suspicion would fall on him, I told him of his danger, and had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to leave the country; but I ultimately did so, paying his passage to Australia by a steamer which sailed early that morning, and where he is now doing well. He writes me word, expressing but one wish, that his wife and child were with him."

"May Heaven bless you!" was all Laura could say, and then she fell on her knees, bathing his hand with her hot, burning tears.

CONCLUSION.

BUT Bertie did not die, and in the gray-haired gentleman who walks but slightly lame with the aid of a stick, one would never recognise the invalid who was dragged in a chair over the Dunkirk Sands; but it is often more otherwise that the stick even is thrown aside, and he rests alone on the arm of Laura, his wife.

There are only those two now left to each other, for Lady Leach has long joined the majority; and Florence Marston, with her daughter, have been united in a far-away land to the husband whose past troubles are forgotten in his present happiness!

[THE END]

CLIFFE COURT.

—10:—

CHAPTER XIV.—(continued)

PRESENTLY a shot was heard from a distant part of the wood, and Arline started up, and withdrew her face from Hubert's shoulder.

"I had better go and fetch help at once, had I not?"

"No, not just yet. Wait a little, and I will come with you."

"You! But you cannot walk."

"I fancy I could if I tried, and if I had an arm to lean on."

There was something in his voice that struck Arline as bordering very nearly on laughter.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed quickly; "were you not wounded?"

"Yes, my arm was struck and it bled a good deal, but that will soon be all right. The deadliest wound was in my heart, and you have cured it—almost."

Arline stood half petrified, and Hubert, who had risen to his feet, threw his uninjured arm round her waist, and bent down to look into her eyes.

"Won't you forgive the ruse, Arline? I know I had offended you by my conduct this afternoon, and I know, too, what a proud little girl it was, and therefore unlikely to draw back from the declaration of hatred uttered with such vehemence a little while ago. When the keepers started in pursuit of those rascally poachers, I

should have gone too, but I was so anxious about you that I resolved to leave everything else in order to assure myself of your safety, and it was just as I had bound my handkerchief round my arm to stop the bleeding, and was going to find you, that I saw you coming towards me, and I could not resist the temptation of finding out whether you had spoken truly, or whether you loved me."

"It was unkind—unfair," she murmured.

"It was neither, or it if it were the means were justified by the end I had in view. Think, darling, the happiness of a whole lifetime was at stake! You surely will not blame me for risking something to secure it!"

"The happiness!" she echoed, bitterly; "say rather the misery. This is but the prelude to a long parting."

"Not so, dearest. You must become my wife as soon as possible, and then there will be no such thing as parting, until death itself comes between us."

"You are talking under the influence of excitement," she said, with a little sad smile which the darkness hid. "You forget the difference of position between us."

"I forget it, certainly," he interrupted, "but if I remembered it, it would be all the same, my sweetheart! Don't you know that Love is a socialist—the mightiest of all agents in working revolutions, and that it reck of nothing save its own power? It has spanned torrents wider than Niagara, it has bridged over chasms that have seemed hopeless, and the social difference between us is, after all, nothing to speak of. Ah! Arline, you little know the feeling you have awoken within me, if you think such considerations as those have a feather's weight with me!"

"Not with you, perhaps, but there is your uncle to consider."

Hubert's brows knitted themselves together.

"In such a matter as this my uncle has no right to interfere."

"No right, perhaps, but he will think he has."

"Then I must let him know differently."

"And provoke his anger?"

"That I can't help. A man must leave his father and mother even, for the sake of his wife, and if it be necessary to brave my uncle's anger on your behalf, believe me, darling, I shall not shrink from the ordeal."

"And do you think I would be the cause of a rupture between you?" Arline exclaimed, vehemently. "No—a thousand times, no!"

"Hush!" Hubert said, stopping her with kisses, "you have my happiness to consider first, and whatever you might say or do would not make the slightest difference so far as I am concerned, for nothing in the wide world shall ever come between us—I swear it!"

Wild words—defying a fate against whose power we are all of us helpless!

"Besides," Hubert continued; "however angry my uncle might—may probably would—be he cannot do more than remonstrate—I mean to say, he cannot disinherit me, or anything of that sort, for the estates are entailed, and they must descend, with the title, to me, unless," he added, laughing—"Lord Cliffe should take it into his head to marry and have children, in which case it would be rather a bad look-out. But even then I should survive it, for I have health and strength, and with these two a man ought surely to be able to fight the battle of life."

"Only," Arline murmured; "the thought that I was the means of bringing trouble upon you would make me so very miserable!"

"And the thought that I was working for you would make me so very happy! Thus, you see, the balance is struck. But we will hope such a state of things will not come to pass. Uncle Everard is, after all, a reasonable man, and when he sees that nothing he can say has power to change my resolution, he won't waste time and words in a useless endeavour. Besides, you must bring the influence of your sweet face to bear upon him, and he will be something more than human if he can withstand it!"

"And what will Lady de Roubaix say?"

Hubert's face fell again, and he hesitated before replying.

"What a terrible girl you are for suggesting difficulties!" he exclaimed at length, lightly. "Charles has no right to interfere, and if she is arrogant enough to assume one, she must be taught better. But let us dismiss all these chimerical fears from our minds, and think only of ourselves, and our new-found happiness."

And this they did—walking quietly home under the arching branches, out into the misty radiance of the stars—those immutable witnesses of human life, that have seen the centuries roll by, men and women come and go, and through it all the love that never dies, that never grows old or stale—that is to-day what it was when Adam whispered to Eve, before they were driven forth from the flame-guarded gates of Eden!

CHAPTER XV.

FOR some moments after Colonel Stuart left her Alicia remained in exactly the same attitude, gazing blankly before her, in a sort of stupor, from which she was roused by a hand being laid on her shoulder, and the voice of her husband, saying,—

"So, Lady Carlyon, I find you giving assignments to your former lover!"

"What!" she exclaimed, turning upon him a white, bewildered face, as if she hardly comprehended the meaning of his words.

"I repeat, you have been meeting Colonel Stuart—I saw him leave you a few minutes ago."

"I do not deny it, but the meeting was purely accidental."

"Ah! no doubt," he sneered. "These sort of encounters usually are—especially if they happen to be surprised! I shall not reproach you as I have the right to do; but it must be my duty to see that in future you have no chance of risking such accidents. I have myself to think of as well as you, and the rôle of injured husband is not one that I covet."

She said nothing—indeed, what could she say! Her head was in a whirl, and Basil's last "good-bye," kept repeating itself, like a dirge in her ears, bringing with it the conviction that they had parted for ever.

Sir Ascot walked by her side till they reached home, and then accompanied her to her apartments, where she sank down in a chair near the window, and gazed out on the dreary, rain-blurred gardens. Her husband partly guessed her frame of mind from her agitated demeanour, and it struck him he might possibly play upon it to some advantage.

"I have bad news for you, Alicia—your boy is ill," he said, making the announcement without any unnecessary ceremony.

All her apathy vanished as if by magic, and she started up, clasping her hands together.

"Ill—Douglas, ill! Is this true, Ascot, or are you saying it to torture me!"

"It is quite true, but if you doubt my word read this."

He handed her a telegram, and seizing it she read these words:—

"From Miss Oway to Sir Ascot Carlyon:—" "Douglas is much worse, have called in a second physician, but he holds out very little hope unless a change takes place before night. You or your wife had better come at once."

The poor young mother dropped the telegram with a deep groan, and threw herself on her knees at her husband's feet.

"Ascot—let me see him—for the love of Heaven, let me go to him at once. Remember, he is your child as well as mine, and his poor little spark of life may go out with neither of us by! Have some pity!" she entreated, wildly.

"There is a train which leaves Cliffe at half-past five, and it is now a little after four," said the Baronet, deliberately, as he pulled his watch out of his pocket and looked at it. "So there would be ample time to drive to the station, and you have your hat and cloak on ready. I will order the carriage, and accompany you myself."

She seized his hand, and covered it with kisses.

"I know your cruelty could not last—humanity itself forbade it!" she exclaimed.

"Stay!" he said, "you have not heard me to the end. I will let you go on condition that you put your signature to the document lying on my study table downstairs—not unless—"

All the fervour died from her face, and she sank down in an attitude of utter despair. The mother's tortured heart cried—

"Let everything go—do as he says! What is wealth in comparison with your son's life!"

Sir Ascot watched her and saw the struggle, and his heart gave a quick throb of triumph—at last she would surrender!

"Surely you will not hesitate in a case like this!" he said. "If he died, and you did not see him, you would be the victim of a life-long regret."

"Great heavens! what a nature you must have to attempt such a bargain with me now!" she exclaimed, with exceeding bitterness. "Ours would think Douglas were less than a stranger to you."

Sir Ascot shrugged his shoulders.

"I must look after my own interests, you know; and as for heartlessness—it seems to me you are displaying that quality now. Evidently you care more for carrying your own point than for your child."

"It is because I care so much for him that I hesitate."

"And while you are weighing his life and your estates in the balance, time is going on, and in a little while all chance of seeing him may be denied you."

His argument would have had very little weight with her had not her own heart pleaded as it did. To such a struggle there could be but one end, as he had foreseen.

"I yield!" she exclaimed, in desperation. "Take me downstairs, and I will sign anything you wish me."

Sir Ascot was too discreet to express his elation at the victory he had achieved, but his dark eyes blazed with triumph at her words.

"That is well. I will get the butler and Dr. West—whom I perceive coming up the avenue—to witness the execution of the deed."

Half mechanically she followed him downstairs into his study, her face full of a dull despair. On the table lay the parchment which was to take from her the lands for whose possession she had fought so hardly—and with such a futile result!

Sir Ascot left to meet Dr. West and bring him in, and the echo of his footsteps had hardly died away before a footman entered, carrying on a salver the letters that had come by the afternoon post. The uppermost envelope bore the writing of the Baronet's aunt, and Lady Carlyon immediately seized it and tore it open, reckless in her anxiety for news of her boy of what her husband might say at having his correspondence looked at.

Her eyes glanced swiftly over the first part of the letter, which treated entirely of business matters, but at the end she read,—

"Douglas is very well, indeed, and seems happy enough with his nurse. I am glad to say he gives me very little trouble, so you need not take him away until you wish to have him again."

Alicia let fall the paper in her astonishment, then snatched it up and looked at the date. It was of that very day, and had clearly been written in the morning, for the hour, 9.50 A.M., was added to the date. The telegram was in her pocket, and she opened it to see what time it had been sent out, 9.45—that would be before the letter was written.

The fact that the telegram was a false one, despatched through Sir Ascot's agency flashed upon her in a moment—he had sent it, calculating upon the effect it would have on her; and utterly oblivious of every consideration that a man of honour would have felt at such a deception, and but for the accident of her having seen his aunt's letter, the ruse would have been successful.

A few minutes later the Baronet entered, followed by Dr. West.

"I have ordered the carriage, Alicia, and it will be ready directly," he said, briskly, going to

the table, and looking about for a pen. "Here—this is the place you must sign."

He pointed to it with his forefinger, then dipped the pen in the ink, and extended it towards her.

"Be quick," he said, impatiently; "we have no time to spare if we intend catching the half-past five train."

"I do not intend catching it," she returned, very quietly.

"What!"

"I repeat I have no object in going away now that I know my boy is quite well."

The pen dropped from his fingers, and he stood a little way off gazing at her in surprise, while an expression of blank dismay spread itself over his face.

"What do you mean!"

"I mean that through the accident of opening Miss Oway's letter I have arrived at a knowledge of your treachery!" she exclaimed, in her clear, high-pitched tones, while her lip curled, and her eyes flashed with fine scorn. "I thought I knew your character pretty well before, but I had no idea of the baseness of the depths to which you would descend. I shall be better prepared in future."

To attempt to describe the Baronet's fury would be impossible. He had been so near success; and now the cup was dashed to the ground just as it touched his lips!

A savage oath burst from him, and he raised his arm, almost as if he would have struck his wife in the violence of his passion.

She never flinched, but Dr. West caught him by the sleeve, and drew him away.

"Don't forget yourself like that, Carlyon," he said in a low voice; "you won't do any good by personal violence. You are folled this time, and the only thing for you is to submit with as good a grace as you can."

He held the door open for Lady Carlyon, who went out at once, and then the physician came back to the Baronet, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Don't look so hopeless, Carlyon—you haven't played your last card yet."

"Haven't I! By Jove, it seems very much like it, for I see no chance of vanquishing her," was the moody answer; and unless I get the money this week it will be all over with me."

"You have trusted to your own measures so far, but now we'll see what effect mine have," said Dr. West, in his slow, soft tone, and Sir Ascot looked up at him inquiringly; "I suppose your reward would be liberal in case I succeeded!"

"Instead of a hundred, I will give you five hundred the day the deed is signed!"

"That is a bargain then—but give me a few lines to that effect before we go any further."

The Baronet did as he was requested, and West put the memorandum carefully away in his pocket-book.

"I have not studied drugs and their effects all these years for nothing," he observed, with a smile of peculiar significance; "and I fancy through their aid we may bring Lady Carlyon to a state of compliance without further loss of time. At all events, we will leave no effort untried in endeavouring to do so!"

CHAPTER XVI.

LADY DE ROUBAIX did not stay long in the sick room after the departure of the physician—perhaps she found it rather dull work sitting by the bedside and watching Either Grant's various countenance, or perhaps she had no further object to serve by remaining.

As she went downstairs, she was met by Lord Cliffe, and together they proceeded to the library.

On the table was an ancient-looking map on parchment that attracted Cliffe's attention, and she bent down to examine it.

"It is a plan of Cliffe Court that I chanced upon this morning when I was looking over some old family deeds," said the Viscount, in explanation.

Mon. "It is rather ancient, but it gives me a good idea of the house, especially of the west wing."

"That is called the 'haunted wing,' is it not?" asked Clarice.

Lord Cliffe smiled.

"Yes, it has somehow earned that appellation—perhaps because it has been closed for so many years."

"Why is it closed?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it is in very bad repair, and I have never thought it worth while having workmen in to put it right, especially as we have already more room than we need; but I believe it was originally shut up in consequence of the rumours that were spread about of its being the haunt of supernatural beings. It is one of the oldest portions of the Court, and full of odd nooks and corners, that were formerly used as hiding places for conspirators during the wars."

"And is there not a story connected with it?" inquired Lady de Roubaix, with some interest.

"Yes; a tragic one, and very much resembling other ghostly legends. I suppose every noble family in England is in the possession of one, more or less veracious. Should you like to hear it?"

"Immensely," the Countess responded, leaning back against the purple velvet cushions of the armchair and calling to Gyp—Hubert's colliè—to come to her, an invitation Gyp declined with an ungracious growl.

Try as she would, Lady de Roubaix could not make the dog like her.

"If I were an author, or if I had even as much imagination as Hubert, I should spin the legend out into a regular story," began Lord Cliffe, laughing; "but as I am neither I must cut it short, and only tell you the bare facts, as I heard them from my mother, who was very fond of repeating them:—"

"It seems, many years ago, in the reign of one of the Charles's, I believe, the Lord of Cliffe had but one daughter, a very beautiful girl, named Hildred, and she, of course, was his heiress. A younger brother, however, was the father of two sons, and to the elder, Richard, it was decided Lady Hildred should be married, so as to keep the title and estates together."

"She, however, with the perversity of modern young ladies, chose to fall in love with the younger brother, Piers, and absolutely declined the alliance her father had proposed for her."

"This, of course, roused the fury of her father, and while the two brothers were out hunting one day Piers was stabbed to the heart, and his lifeless body brought home to Cliffe Court, to a room in the west wing that had been closed for many, many years."

"Hildred saw the corpse of her lover, and accused Richard of being his murderer, an accusation he could not deny; and then the girl pronounced a terrible curse on the race, the exact words of which are not recorded, but she fell dead on Piers' body; and since then, the story goes, it is fatal for a reigning Lord of Cliffe to enter that room, for so surely as he does he is shortly afterwards overtaken by a violent death. Strange to relate, this tradition has been curiously verified more than once, and the coincidence has led to the tale being received as true."

"And do you believe in it, Uncle Everard?"

"I! Certainly not, I am not so credulous."

"And yet," pursued Clarice, "if it came to the point, I daresay you would hesitate before entering the room."

"I don't think so; I flatter myself I am above such foolish superstitions. But I have not told you all yet. Since Lady Hildred's death she has been fit to haunt the scenes of her mortal career, and always appears in the guise of a lady dressed in white, on the eve of the demise of any of the Cliffe's. Is it not a romantic legend?"

"Very."

"Why, you look quite solemn—as if you were inclined to believe it true!" exclaimed the Viscount, laughing.

"I am not quite sure that I don't believe it," she responded, thoughtfully.

"Nonsense! Do you suppose it possible such things as 'ghosts' are permitted to walk the earth?"

"I really don't see any great reason to doubt it. You know 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy!'—and for my part, I have always been inclined to fancy that there would not be such a universal belief in spirits unless there was some ground for it."

"Then it is time you were taught better," Lord Cliffe said, rising. "Suppose we go upstairs and investigate these mysterious apartments. I have the key of the door leading to them."

Clarice made no objection, so they proceeded through a long corridor that led to the west wing, and passed before a heavy oak door, which the Viscount, with some difficulty—for the lock had grown rusty from disuse—contrived to open. This gave access to another long passage, the walls of which were hung with tapestry, faded into a neutral grey with age, and eaten into holes by rats. From the ceiling depended long festoons of cobwebs—the work of many generations of spiders, who had lived and died, undisturbed by the brooms of housemaids.

Farther on were the apartments—all furnished in the style of a couple of centuries ago, and presented a mournful spectacle of desolation; the hangings were falling away from the walls, the furniture was moth-eaten and covered fumes in dust, and only the faintest light came in through the mullioned windows.

After they had walked through and examined a few objects of interest, Clarice said,—

"But where is the room in which Lady Hildred pronounced her curse?"

The Viscount led her in silence to a door on which a large red cross had been painted, and at the sight of it Lady de Roubaix—naturally superstitious—gave a violent start. Her uncle observed it, and laughed.

"If you are thus frightened outside the portal what would you be inside the room itself?" he said. "In me such terror would be excusable, considering the penalty that is attached to my entering."

"But you say you don't believe in the curse?"

"Neither do I."

"Then you would not mind going inside?"

"Not the slightest. I will prove my veracity if you wish."

He unfastened the door and threw it open, but, in spite of his vaunted bravery, he drew back a step as the interior of the room became visible. It was much in the same state of repair as the others, and was perhaps a little smaller; in one corner was a curiously carved oak cupboard, covered with grotesque masks, and reaching from floor to ceiling, and this was the most prominent object the apartment contained.

"Go in!" Clarice said, with smiling peremptoriness, although her lips trembled while she uttered the word.

He hesitated, then obeyed, and she followed, their feet making deep imprints on the dusty floor; and it must be confessed that both were much paler than usual, although it is probable Lord Cliffe would have contradicted anyone who had accused him of a terror of the unknown.

There was a strange, dead silence in the room, whose effect was heightened by the misty light—for the tattered remnant of curtains still draped the windows. Suddenly this silence was broken by a regular, monotonous tick-tick.

"What is that?" exclaimed Clarice, catching hold of Lord Cliffe's arm.

"Nothing," he answered, glancing round uneasily, as if to make sure they were alone. "It must be my watch," he added.

"It is not your watch—it is much louder, and more peculiarly distinct," she asserted, her lips growing whiter, while she tightened her clasp on his sleeve. "I have heard it before, and I know what it means. It is the Death Watch!"

"How ridiculously fanciful you are!" he exclaimed, moving towards the door, and speaking rather angrily; "your mother must have left

you to the care of ignorant nurses, who fostered your superstitious tendencies."

"Well, we shall see!" she responded, somewhat piqued by the accusation, although she knew it was perfectly well merited. "I heard the same thing before my mother's death, so you must acknowledge I have some reason for fearing it."

"A mere coincidence, such as often happens—nothing more. I am surprised that an educated woman should allow herself to be influenced by it."

Clarice did not reply, and they went towards the inhabited portion of the house.

"I will have that wing repaired, and made fit for habitation—it has been empty quite long enough," declared Lord Cliffe. "Deserted rooms, full of moths and dust, are conducive to ghosts; but carpenters and painters, and a consignment of tables and chairs from Maple's, will do a great deal towards sending them to the rightabout. At all events, I will try the experiment."

In spite of himself and his own convictions he was conscious of a strange sort of chill that had fallen upon him directly he entered the doomed chamber, and which Clarice's words had increased.

He tried in vain to shake it off, and at last went out in the park, with the idea of the fresh air doing him good.

As Lady de Roubaix was entering her room she was met by the nurse who had been engaged to attend to Esther Grant.

"The doctor has just sent the medicine, and there is something for you, my lady," she said, extending a small bottle wrapped in white paper as she spoke.

"Thank you," the Countess responded, taking it from her. "By the bye," she added, "I think you said you wanted to go into the village this evening, did you not?"

"I should like to go for an hour or so—one of the housemaids has promised to watch by Mrs. Grant while I am away."

"I will watch myself—I have nothing to do, and it will be an amusement for me," said Lady de Roubaix, and the nurse bowed and thanked her, privately wondering what this freak on the Countess's part might be attributed to—she had been with the patient a couple of hours already, and certainly Esther Grant was far from an interesting invalid.

However, it was not her place to question the fancies of the beautiful Countess, so she went to the village, made her few purchases, and on her return proceeded to the sick-room, and met Lady de Roubaix coming out—her cheeks very red, and a bright, triumphant light in her eyes.

"The patient is all right," she observed, passing on. "She has fallen asleep, and so I took the opportunity of leaving her."

She had fallen asleep very soundly, and the nurse looked rather puzzled as she leaned over her, and listened to her heavy, irregular breathing.

"I've never seen her sleep like this in the daytime," she muttered to herself; "it looks as if she had had an opiate given her—but that can't be, for Dr. Fletcher said it wouldn't do to let her take any narcotics."

She shook her gently, and tried to awaken her in order to administer her medicine, but the sick woman was in so firm a slumber that all her efforts were vain, and at last she desisted, and sitting down by the bedside began to work.

Some little time after there was a knock at the door, and on opening it she saw Lord Cliffe standing on the threshold.

"I wanted to see the patient, nurse," he said. "Dr. Fletcher has given me permission to put a few questions to her, although he does not hold out much hope of her being able to answer them."

"I'm afraid not either, my lord. She is asleep now, but if your lordship will please to come in, I'll try to wake her."

The Viscount entered, but would not consent to have Mrs. Grant disturbed. He looked at her very fixedly as her head lay on the pillow, and then shook his own.

"I have not the faintest recollection of her features. I do not believe I have ever seen her before," he muttered to himself, his expression growing graver; then turning to the nurse, he added, "she has something round her neck, has she not?"

"Yes, my lord—a little bag."

"Con aining papers?"

"I believe so—at least, it sounds like it." The nurse, as she spoke, bent over the sleeping woman, and drew forth the linen bag to show Lord Cliffe. "It is not often she removes her fingers from it, even in her sleep—but this is such a strange kind of sleep."

The Viscount looked at it, then he seemed to debate with himself. At last he said,—

"It is of some importance that I should try and discover the identity of this poor woman, and the only way of doing it seems to be by looking at the contents of this bag. I will take on myself the risk of opening it, and will put the papers back after I have examined them."

The nurse thought such a proceeding perfectly justifiable, and detached the bag from Mrs. Grant's neck.

"Shall I unpick the stitches for you, my lord?"

"Thank you; I shall be obliged if you will."

She took a pair of scissors, and began her task—not a very difficult one, for the stitches were large and irregular.

"Then as done this work didn't know much about sewing," she ventured to remark, as she held out the bag to Lord Cliffe.

Inside was a sheet of paper, many times folded, and this the Viscount opened. In the centre was a sheet of tissue paper containing a few faded flowers. Nothing else—no word of writing—no sign to show whence the woman came, or whether she was going—only a little bunch of withered blossom. A keen look of disappointment appeared in the Viscount's face.

"My trouble has been in vain," he remarked. "You had better restore the bag to its former condition, and put it round her neck again. There is nothing in it to help us, but doubtless the poor woman cherishes the flowers because of some tender memories connected with them."

He went from the room, and the nurse prepared to obey his wishes, but before putting the flowers back she satisfied her own private curiosity by examining them.

"They aren't so very old either, for the rose still has some scent left, and even a little bit of colour. Whoever gave them to her must have got them from a greenhouse, for tube-roses and stephanotis don't grow out of doors," she said to herself, as she finished her task. "It was rather a sell for my lord, after all the trouble he had taken."

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. BELTON was sitting up for Arline, and scolded her very severely for staying so long in the cottage; but the young girl, so far from resenting, heard all she had to say with a bright smile, and never made the least attempt to excuse herself.

"I wonder what's up with you?" the housekeeper said, regarding her curiously. "You look as if you'd had a fortune left you, or a good offer of marriage—which silly girls think is the same thing!"

Arline blushed rosy red, and stooped to pick up her gloves, in order to hide her face.

"It's a nice time to have supper," grumbled Mrs. Belton; "but I suppose you want something to eat after your walk."

"No, thank you; I'm not hungry."

With some little difficulty Arline at length got off upstairs, but she did not go to bed, for, as a matter-of-fact, she was too excited to sleep. She had so much to think of, for since the morning it seemed to her more events had happened than she had ever experienced in her life before. She went to her window, and leaned out into the damp autumn night, her lips curving in a happy smile.

She could hardly convince herself of the truth of what had happened. It seemed so strange, so dream like, that she pinched herself in order

to feel sure she was awake, and not the victim of some delusion of the senses. In the morning she had gone out dejected, miserable, looking forward to nothing but a life of toll, unlighted by a gleam from the sunshine of love. Now her whole future was radiant with it, for would not Hubert share it with her?

She resolutely put from her all thought of the trouble that she knew must be in store for them both from Lord Cliffe's opposition—time enough to think of that to-morrow—to-night, at least, she would be entirely happy.

How long she remained at the window she did not know, but as she turned away and began undressing herself she discovered that a little bunch of ivy leaves Hubert had picked her on their way home had fallen from her dress, where she had pinned them. Probably they had come unfastened while she was taking off her cloak, and in this case they would be still lying on the floor of the housekeeper's room.

Arline, of course, shuddered at the thought of their being swept away, so she slipped on her dressing-gown, and, taking a light, went out into the passage.

On her way she had to pass the end of the corridor leading to the west wing, and it happened that just as she reached it the clock in the hall struck two, the strokes vibrating on the silence with that peculiarly hollow sound that is only heard in the night.

Arline paused a moment, conscious of a slight feeling of terror, and at that instant her eyes fell on a white figure, slowly advancing with a noiseless movement that may best be described as gliding.

At first the young girl would have run away, but, as a matter-of-fact, she was absolutely incapable of stirring; her feet seemed glued to the ground, and her tongue to the roof of her mouth.

She, in common with the rest of the household, knew the story of the White Lady, and her first idea was that this must be Lady Hilbred herself come back from the grave to warn the Cliffes of some terrible calamity in store for them.

It is easy enough to laugh at "ghosts" and deride them in the daytime, when the sun is shining and there is plenty of company about, but it becomes quite a different matter in the dead of night, when the silence and solitude is unbroken.

And again, who shall say that deep down in our hearts there is not a lurking belief in that world of spirits beyond our ken? Who has not, at one time or another, felt some strange, undefinable presence near him, even if it were invisible?

Arline was braver than the generality of girls, but she nearly fainted with terror while that weird figure, in its trailing white garments and with long black hair falling over the shoulders and down to the waist, glided noiselessly past, and was lost in the murky shadows of the passage leading to the haunted wing; then, without thought of ivy leaves, of Hubert or anything else, she flew back to her room, double locked the door, and sank on the bed, shivering with dread of that phantom world on whose boundaries it seemed to her she had just stood.

(To be continued.)

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The Medical Battery Co., Ltd., 439, Oxford Street, London, W., naming this paper. Send at once, get health and strength, and you'll wonder why you never sent before.

FACETIE.

MAYBE they call ships "she" because their mates are men.

ALWAYS keep your temper; it is worth more to you than it is to anyone else.

INSURANCE AGENT: "Married or single?" Splinter (coolly): "I'll leave that to you, sir."

"WHEN does a budding young damsel burst into fruit?" "When she becomes the apple of somebody's eye."

FRANCES: "I understand Beattie has offered to sing at the charity concert." Phoebe: "I should call that more of a threat than an offer."

"BUT can't the dear little thing's father suggest some name?" "Yes; every night his father calls him a new name; but I'm afraid they wouldn't do."

"YOU always seem to be happy and contented!" "I manage to be just deaf enough not to hear some things, and blind enough not to see others."

OUR PORT: "And was my angel moved to tears by my poor little work?" Our Daughter: "Yes, dear. So silly, wasn't it, to cry at nothing?"

"WHY are you always out walking alone nowadays?" "Because my wife plays the piano so much." "Can she, then, play the piano?" "I don't think she can, but she does!"

"THIS liver is awful, Maud," said Mr. Newwood. "I'm very sorry," returned the bride. "I'll tell the cook to speak to the liveryman about it."

BRAMBLE: "I used to make fun of my wife for shopping all day without buying anything." Thorne: "Did it do any good?" Bramble: "Well, she always buys something now."

"I HAD my photograph taken with my bicycle, but had to reject it." "Wasn't it a good one?" "Yes, mine was all right; but it didn't do my bicycle justice."

LITTLE WILLIE: "Pa, why do they call them 'minor poets'?" Pa: "Because they ought to be working with pick and shovel instead of writing poetry, my son!"

Sympathiser: "Oh, don't despair! If your wife has run away with your friend, can't you forget her?" Hi: "Yes, I can do that; but my poor friend—to think what he's got to endure!"

COLUMBINE: "You look worried." The Comedian: "I am. I can't make out whether the people are laughing because they think I'm funny or because they think it's funny that I am not funny."

"TALK about the difficulty of proposing!" writes "Algernon" from Yarmouth. "The average young man's difficulty when he is thrown continually into the society of pretty girls is to keep from making proposals."

"Do you think you earn enough to support two?" asked her father. "Two?" answered the young man quizzically. "I've only asked for one of your family! Who else are you going to fust on me!"

"Do you regret that you married me?" she asked on the night of the fifth anniversary. "What's the use—O! I mean, my dear," he exclaimed, waking up, "what's the use of asking such foolish questions?"

Mrs. Von Blumer: "I had no idea Mrs. Plankington was so mean until I went shopping with her." Von Plumer: "What did she do?" Mrs. Von Blumer: "I insisted upon paying her cab fare, and she let me do it."

HER HERO (sentimentally): "If I were to propose to you, what would be to you the most vivid mind-picture of the future?" His Heroine (expectantly): "A little pinsh-box, satin-lined, containing a diamond ring."

"YOUR mother-in-law accuses you of stealing her trunk. What have you to say?" "Your honour, I simply hid her trunk; I was so afraid she'd leave us." He was given eighteen months—six for stealing, and twelve for lying.

FRIEND: "I know you are a proud and happy father, and I've no doubt that baby is a regular cherub, and all that; but I don't see why you need hold your head quite so high." Young Father: "That's to keep from drooping asleep."

THE conversation had turned upon clubs and bachelors' quarters. "Why is it?" she asked, dreamily, "that men don't marry?" "With your permission," he replied, "I shall be pleased to prove to you that they do."

BINGO (after arguing one hour and thirty-five minutes with his wife): "Now, my dear, what I want to know is this, are you going to give in?" Mrs. Bingo (defiantly): "No; I'm not!" Bingo: "Then I suppose I'll have to."

FOREMAN (quarry gang): "It's sad news Ol' how' for yer, Mrs. McGaherraghty. Y'r husband's new watch is broken. It was a foina watch, an' it's smashed all to pieces." Mrs. McG.: "Dearie me! How did that happen?" Foreman: "A ten-ton rock fell on 'im."

MYRTLE: "What do you think I've had three proposals in as many days, and, oh, dear! I'm in such a quandary. I don't know which one to accept." Addie: "Oh, take them all and make sure. It may be possible that one of them really means it."

THREE different waiters at a hotel asked a prima, precise little professor at dinner if he would have soup. A little annoyed, he said to the last waiter who asked the question: "Is it compulsory?" "No, sir," said the waiter, "I think it's mock turtle."

"I AM dreadfully sorry, Harry," she said, "but our wedding will have to be postponed." "Postponed!" he exclaimed. "Why?" "Papa told me last night that, owing to other heavy items, he did not see how he could possibly afford a son-in-law this year."

"CHARLIE, dear," said young Mrs. Torkins, "the baby is trying to talk again. It's wonderful how he takes after you!" "What is he talking about?" "I think it must have been politics. He started very calmly, but in a few minutes he was as angry and red in the face as he could be."

Mrs. JONES: "Your son Thomas sick? I'm sorry to hear that." Mrs. GREEN: "Yes. The poor fellow was out painting the town, as I have since been informed by young Slater, who lives next door, and I'm afraid the smell of the paint was too much for him. His stomach is not very strong."

SHE WAS Right Too.—Father (left in charge): "No, you cannot have any more cake. (Very seriously) "Do you know what I shall have to do if you go on making that dreadful noise!" Little Girl (sobbing): "Yes." Father: "Well, what is that?" Little Girl: "Give me some more cake."

THE cannibal chieftain regarded the stout man with interest. "So you used to be a great bicyclerider," he repeated. "We may congratulate ourselves that you did not use racing handlebars." The captive gazed inquiringly. "That is to say," continued his host, "they would have made you lean."

SUMMER BOARDER: "I think, considering the price I pay, and the poor accommodations you have, you might at least treat me with respect." Mrs. Hayfork: "Well, mum, to tell the truth, I can't feel much respect for people what pays the big prices I charge for the sort of accommodations I give."

"AND that is silver ore, is it?" said an old lady, as she examined a carious-looking bit of mineral. "Yes," said her husband. "And how do they get the silver out?" "They smelt it." "Well, that's queer," she said, applying her nose to the ore. "I smelt it, too, but I didn't get any silver."

A HANSON DRIVER had just picked up a fare, and was hurrying along one of the crowded streets in the West End when the wheel of his cab just managed to graze a horse which a very stout man was driving. "Now, then, can't you see me?" bawled out the infuriated bus-driver. "No," replied the cabby. "Yer whip's in front of yer!"

HE: "You acknowledge that you—er—like me, yet refuse." She (belle of the season): "Yes, I must. Thirteen is an unlucky number." "Eh?" "You are the thirteenth man who has proposed to me; and if we should become engaged I'm afraid something dreadful would happen." "You are foolishly superstitious. What could happen?" "I might marry you."

THE other day a little boy wandering alone in the direction of some crags tumbled over, but luckily escaped with nothing worse than a bad fright. When he came home, he told his sister what had happened to him. "An' did ye green when ye got up again, Johnny?" his sister said. To which the youngster replied: "What wad hae been th' use o' greetin' when there wis na-body there to hear me!"

WE had been discussing the beauties of Shakespeare, and one of us had quoted King Henry's soliloquy on sleep. "Beautiful indeed!" "Exquisite!" "Such pathos!" "Sublime!" ejaculated several of the company. Then the irreverent one spoke: "I can't help thinking that the king was a bit of a duffer! He must have been acquainted with the philosophy of Mahomet contained in his observation that if the mountain wouldn't come to him he must go to the mountain." "What of that?" inquired we. "Why, this: when the king found sleep wouldn't come to him, he should have gone to sleep."

IN the garden of a well-known Scotch earl, whose head-gardener was a methodical old fellow with an eye for effect, there were two summer-houses resembling each other in dimensions and situation. In one of these the earl, during his walks, observed a youth looking out of the window. On approaching the door his lordship found it locked, and also perceived his gardener's son looking out of the window of the corresponding building, which was in like manner locked. "Why are those lads shut up?" asked the earl. "My lord," replied the gardener, "I caught that rascal—pointing to the stranger—"stealing the fruit, an' I put oor Jemal in, please your lordship, for the sake o' symmetry."

GEORGE GORDON, an old man of miserly habits, was dying. A neighbour who was on friendly terms with the old man's relatives agreed to call on the minister, and beg him to try and induce the old fellow to make a will. The minister consented, and at length persuaded the miser to allow a lawyer to be sent for. By the time he arrived the old man was rapidly sinking; but the will was smartly drawn up, and duly awaited his signature. He was propped up in bed, and managed to write "George Gor—"; then he fell back exhausted. An eager relative who stood by seized the pen and stuck it in the dying man's hand. "'D, Geordie, 'd!' he urged, referring to the next letter of the signature. The old man glared up wrathfully. "Dee!" he snapped. "I'll dee when I'm ready, ye avaricious wretch!"

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SOCIETY.

EXTENSIVE alterations are to be carried out at the Neue Palais during the winter. Prince and Princess Frederick Charles of Hesse and their children and Prince and Princess Adolphus of Schaumburg-Lippe will occupy the palace of the Empress Frederick on the Unter den Linden during the Court season, which continues from New Year's Day until the second week in February.

PRINCE OSCAR OF GERMANY is in his twelfth year, and is already in two regiments, and wears on state occasions the ribbon of the Order of the Black Eagle over his little uniform. Prince August William is in his thirteenth year, and is in the same regiments and has the same orders as his brother, Prince Joachim. The Crown Prince of Germany is in his eighteenth year. His grandfather, Frederick the Third, was twenty-seven when he married the Crown Princess of Great Britain and Ireland. It is now the fashion to make very early alliances for the heirs of Royal houses. The Crown Prince's wife may be chosen for him within the next few years.

THE Empress of Germany is a woman of great charm of manner and tact. She has changed in appearance since her last visit to London over eight years ago. Her Majesty's hair has silvered extraordinarily for a woman of her age, and she is thinner. The Empress is a handsome woman, of very imposing presence, and fine carriage. She is also a past-mistress in the art of dress. The Queen has always warmly admired her Imperial granddaughter-in-law, whose qualities as wife and mother are such as to command our own beloved Sovereign's respect. The Empress exerts a great influence with the Emperor, and uses it freely in many good causes. Her Majesty identifies herself closely with the Emperor's chief interests.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales will make Sandringham their headquarters until the end of January, and three large shooting parties are to be entertained at the Hall during the winter, besides a number of Saturday-till-Monday guests, including Ministers, and ex-Ministers, Ambassadors and Foreign Ministers, and ecclesiastical, military and naval notables. The Royal guests at Sandringham will include the Duke and Duchess of Connaught and Princess Margaret, Prince and Princess Christian, and Princess Victoria, Princess Louise, the Duke of Cambridge, and Count Albert Mensdorff.

HER MAJESTY has finally decided to spend about six weeks during the spring at Bordighera, where a considerable part of the Hôtel Auger has been taken for Her Majesty for the months of March and April by M. Dumas, the director of the Royal journeys on the Continent, who has visited every place on the Italian Riviera between Ventimiglia and Spezia in search of a suitable residence for the Queen. Bordighera has been selected by the advice of the Empress Frederick, who spent three months there during the early part of the year, and Princess Beatrice was delighted with the place when she went over there in the spring from Cimiez to visit her sister. The Queen will travel direct from Cherbourg or Calais, passing round Paris by the Circular Railway, and proceeding through the Mont Cenis tunnel to Turin and Genoa, and thence to her destination. Bordighera is a very pretty little town, with one of the best climates on this coast, and the country all round is very beautiful, there being many lovely drives both along the coast and to the Nerve and other valleys. The roads are not yet infested by the automobiles which during the last year have rendered the French Riviera quite dangerous for carriage traffic. The Queen will be able to lead a quieter and more restful life at Bordighera than was possible at Cimiez, where last year Her Majesty was considerably fatigued by the daily reception and entertainment of the numerous Imperial and Royal personages who were then staying on the Riviera.

STATISTICS.

ABOUT 1,500,000 persons are employed in the coal-mines of the world.

ELEVEN cubic feet of water, when frozen, make twelve cubic feet of ice.

THE coast-line of Alaska is more than 3,000 miles longer than that of all the rest of the United States.

AMONG every 1,000 bachelors there are 38 criminals; among married men the ratio is only 18 per 1,000.

THE time required for a journey round the earth by a man walking day and night without resting, would be 428 days; an express train, 40 days; sound, at a medium temperature, 32½ hours; a cannon-ball, 21½ hours; light, a little over one-tenth of a second; and electricity passing over a copper wire a little under one-tenth of a second.

GEMS.

MEN are made more unhappy by the ills they fear than by those they suffer.

THOUGH we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not.

MEN imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emits a breath every moment.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PEACH SWEET PICKLE.—Three pints of sugar to one quart of vinegar. Let boil and add a few sticks of cinnamon, about six or eight cloves, and two or three little pieces of mace. When it boils add peaches, and when clear put in jars, cover with syrup, and seal. Before taking off the fire, add a pinch of salt and a pinch of red pepper.

AUSTRIAN PUDDING.—Ingredients: One pound flour, pinch salt, one large teaspoonful baking powder, a quarter-pound finely-chopped suet, one tablespoonful sugar, one breakfast cup milk, and one breakfast cup treacle. Mix the dry ingredients together, then warm the milk, stir it into the treacle, and add it to the pudding. Mix well, and boil in a well-buttered basin for three hours.

SAVOURY FISH PIE.—Ingredients: Two pounds filleted fish, half-pint breadcrumbs, seasoned with parsley; two eggs, half-cup milk, pepper and salt. Cut the fish into rather small pieces, sprinkle well with the seasoning, roll up, and arrange in a buttered pie-dish, medium size; cover the top with remainder of seasoning, and lay on some small pieces of butter, over which pour two well-beaten eggs mixed with half-cup milk, and bake in moderate oven for forty minutes.

SHRIMP-AND-EGG SANDWICHES.—Ingredients: Two hard-boiled eggs, one ounce shrimp-paste, one and a half ounces fresh butter, pepper, two tablespoonfuls cream, some thin slices brown-bread. The eggs might be hard-boiled beforehand. Then take out the yolks, rub them and the shrimp-paste and the butter, which must first be slightly warmed, through a fine wire or hair sieve. Season carefully, remembering not to make it too peppery. Put the cream into a little basin and whisk till stiff, then add it gradually to the yolks, &c. Next cut the thin slices of brown-bread, or these might also have been prepared by the maid beforehand and kept covered up in a serviette. Spread a layer of the mixture on one slice, cover with another. Now spread on that a layer of the mixture again, and press on gently one more slice of bread. Then cut into finger-shaped pieces, and serve piled up on a pretty lace-paper.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE proportion of female to male teachers is increasing in England.

WHISTLING is regarded as a violation of the Divine law by Icelanders.

THE goldfish is a great coward, and a tiny fish with the courage to attack it can frighten it almost to death.

THE shovel fish is so called because it uses its nose to turn over the mud at the bottom of the sea in quest of the worms and small shellfish on which it feeds.

PISCATORIAL authorities say that, were it not for the natural enemies of fish, the codfish would fill all the available space in the seas, rivers, and oceans.

THE burning of the bride's playthings is part of the wedding-ceremony in Japan. The bride lights a torch, which she hands to the bridegroom, who, with it, lights a fire in which the toys are destroyed.

SPIDERS are a serious plague in Japan. They spin their webs on the telegraph-wires, and are so numerous as to cause a serious loss of insulation. Sweeping the wires does little good, as the spiders begin all over again.

THE bee of Mexico does not "improve each shining hour." As there is very little cold weather there, no necessity exists for laying in winter stores of honey, and the bee is, therefore, as lazy as a cockroach.

THE COMMERCIAL POSSIBILITIES OF CANADA.

BY HARRY FURNISS.

IN the Christmas number of the *Windsor Magazine* Mr. Harry Furniss writes at some length on the subject of our Canadian Empire. With regard to the commercial possibilities of the country he says:—"The maritime provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward's Island are rich in fertile soil, with large areas of valuable timber. They have great deposits of coal, iron, and other minerals; millions of tons of granite, marble, and choice building stone can be quarried from their hills; the waters which wash their shores teem with every variety of marketable fish. Quebec and Ontario have yet vaster forests of hard and soft woods. In their temperate climate all kinds of fruits, grains, and vegetables are grown in great quantities; they are rich in valuable minerals, and thousands of streams furnish abundant motive power for manufacturing industries. From the West is the prairie province of Manitoba, with its illimitable expanse of rich soils, which are yielding each year many millions of bushels of wheat, oats, barley, and other grains. In the newer territories between Manitoba and British Columbia there are millions and more millions of acres of the finest wheat-growing land in the world, where the quality known to American and English millers as "Manitoba No. 1 hard," which is superior to the wheat of all other countries for bread-making purposes, can be grown in unlimited quantities. In these regions, too, are fine grazing lands, where great herds of cattle can be raised and fattened at little expense. British Columbia has most of the resources of the other provinces, and some peculiarly her own. Her coal mines furnish the only high-grade coal found on the Pacific coast. Her river sands yield rich returns of gold, and in the newly developed Kootenay district, in the southern part of the province, some of the richest gold and silver deposits ever worked in America have been discovered. Gigantic pines, firs, and other trees cover the greater part of the province, and furnish an inexhaustible supply of lumber for export. The salmon fisheries are a never-failing source of profit, in which large numbers of men are employed. This is but a mere hint at the immense resources, or, in other words, opportunities for the production of wealth of the Dominion of Canada."

<p>The PILLS Cure Complaints of the LIVER and KIDNEYS.</p>	<p align="center">HOLLOWAY'S FOR 60 YEARS PRE-EMINENT AND OINTMENT</p> <p align="center">RECOMMENDED BY ALL GOOD NURSES. NO HOUSEHOLD SHOULD BE WITHOUT THEM. They are Invaluable to Females of All Ages.</p> <p align="center">Manufactured only at 78, NEW OXFORD ST. (late 533, OXFORD ST.), LONDON; Sold by all Chemists.</p>	<p>The OINTMENT Cures Affections of the THROAT and CHEST.</p>
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<p>PEPPER'S TONIC Promotes Appetite. CURES DYSPEPSIA, HYSTERIA, NERVOUS COMPLAINTS. SHILLING BOTTLES.</p>	<p>SULPHOLINE A SPOTLESS SKIN. A BEAUTIFUL COMPLEXION. ERUPTIONS, PIMPLES ENTIRELY FADE AWAY. LOTION SHILLING BOTTLES.</p>
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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. L.—The capital of the Transvaal is Pretoria.
S. H.—Try your local Charity Organisation Society.
G. V.—The children of first cousins may legally marry.
B. P.—General Colley fell at Majuba on February 27th, 1881.
CART.—Mafeking is, we believe, pronounced as Mafeking.
ANNOUN.—Get a deed of mutual separation drawn up by a solicitor.
F. S.—It is usual for the bride's parents or guardians to order and pay for the wedding carriage.
MIRA.—Rubbing a cut lemon on a beefsteak before cooking will make it eat beautifully tender.
GENTLE.—When packing skirts fold them right side out. They are thus less likely to crease than when they are reversed.
PARTIE.—Have a good clear fire by the time you wish to order and throw on a handful of salt to deaden the flames that arise.
J. K.—The landlord is not called upon to state any reason for giving you notice to quit. If he gives you proper legal notice you must accept it.
IMPRECATIONS.—Girls should attire themselves according to their circumstances, and should, above all things, avoid all extremes of fashion, as well as all eccentricities of style.
VERA.—You can make no advances towards your future husband's family until they have called. It is their place to do so first, as they are the older residents.
LAURA.—Rubbing with a sponge dipped in naphtha is the best way to clean them, but remember that naphtha is highly inflammable, so do not use it anywhere near a fire or light.
WORKMEN.—A room may be quickly freed from the smell of tobacco-smoke by placing in it a pall of water containing a handful of hay, which will absorb all the odour of the tobacco.
I. K.—It is forty years since the first British Volunteer donned his uniform—and at that time it was "his" in reality, for even privates in these days provided their own garb and weapons.
TROUBLE.—Where there is no malformation of the organs of articulation, stammering may be remedied by reading aloud with the teeth closed. This should be practised for two hours a day for three or four months.
FLORINE.—To clean cut-glass, first scrub well with warm water and soap. Rinse in clear water, and then brush well into every crevice a paste made of whiting and water. Let dry, brush off, and polish with a soft duster.
KATHER.—It is usual for a bride to make out a list of what she wants, and give it to her mother or sister, in case they are asked what she would like, and also to send to relations and friends who ask her the same question. Otherwise you must make up your mind to have some duplicates.

TOM.—The name "Khaki" given to the colour (and sometimes to the material) of the active service uniform is, we believe, of Indian origin, the word signifying "earth." The colour is of a dull brown earthy colour, and was chosen as least distinguishable at a distance from the colour of the earth.
LONGBAST.—Intaglio means anything engraved; a precious stone with a kind of an inscription cut or hollowed out, so that an impression taken from it would present the appearance of a bas-relief. It is the reverse of a cameo. It is pronounced in-tal-you; the accent on the second syllable.

THE HAPPY CHRISTMAS TIME.

The music of the church bell brings
Remembrance of the Christ child's birth.
"Peace and good will to all," it rings,
"And gifts of holiness and mirth."
So blest the thought of His sweet birth!

I think of all the souls asleep
Beneath the shining of the stars,
And as the hours to morning creep,
Of how His love pure light unbars,
A glory sweeter than the stars!

Men wake, and every home is blest;
The children laugh their gifts to see;
Glad charity is well confessed,
Its fruit adorns the Christmas tree—
A most entrancing sight to see!

When will such love forever bide,
And daily duty know its bliss?
Ah! here we need the roses hide—
That summer yet in bloom shall kiss,
A token true of heavenly bliss!

The church bells ring in cadence clear,
A message to the world so wide,
"Know, souls of men, love's time is here.
When ye in peace and joy abide,
Then happy is the world so wide."

God bless all souls this hallowed morn,
And children sweet with Christly grace;
May love and peace be in us born,
And smile as kindness in our face;
So may we show the Christmas grace.

CONSTANT READER AND FAIRER.—What a pity you were so ill-advised as to tamper with your hair, which you admit was originally of a pretty brown shade! The best thing to do now would be to get a bottle of Condy's Fluid, and apply it, carefully adhering to the instructions given with the bottle. Spread an old handkerchief over your pillow at nights to prevent the fluid staining.
PENLOPE.—A man who has no good object in life is not likely to make a very desirable husband. Your father's decision should prove what stuff he is made of; if his love of ease and idleness is greater than his love for you, then he is totally unworthy to be your husband. We do not consider your father's conditions in the least unreasonable, and if the young man really cares for you he will accept them gladly, we feel sure.

A. P.—Black felt hats that have become limp and shabby may be freshened by sponging with ammonia and water. Then wring a clean cloth out of cold water, lay it over the hat, and iron with a moderately hot iron till the cloth is dry, being careful to keep it as nearly the right shape as possible. Pull the cloth off as soon as you have finished. This raises the nap again, and the hat will look almost like new. Black straw can be painted over with a weak solution of gum-water and black ink mixed in equal quantities.

L. E.—Good conversationalists are comparatively few. Some of the best writers have been very poor talkers. By reading, however, one may acquire a familiarity with current events and opinions, and need not appear at a loss for ideas nor appear ignorant. Next to being a good talker is to be an attentive listener, and the latter is often more appreciated than the former. As to your knowledge of words, it is a good plan to have a dictionary at hand, so that in reading and writing, when you are in doubt as to the meaning or spelling of a word, you can refer to it.

IVORY.—If the ivory is real, it may be cleaned first with spirits of wine rubbed in with a piece of flannel, and then make up a paste of whiting and spirits of wine, which lay on for some hours till quite dry. This may be repeated several times and will eventually restore the colour, but it is a difficult matter, because you must on no account allow any of the whiting to go down the sides, or you will be doing great injury to the instrument. If they are made of imitation ivory you cannot restore the colour without removing the surface, which should be done by an expert provided with suitable implements.

C. D.—Put a few drops of glycerine (about six) into half a teacupful of cold water; take a muslin rag and wring tightly out of this water; then rub lightly over the collar or shirt front; apply a good hot polishing iron and finish; turpentine may be used in the same way, a few drops added to the dampening water instead of the glycerine; another way, also a very good one, is to rub a duster (which has been tightly squeezed out of cold water) over a piece of pure white soap, and apply it lightly to the article to be glazed; if the article is polished on a hard board a higher polish may be obtained.

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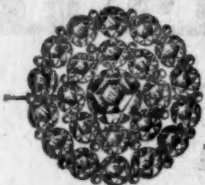
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